

THE
INTERPRETER
COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS.
G. J. WHYTE MELVILLE
VOL. 857.

THE INTERPRETER BY G. J. WHYTE MELVILLE.
IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II.



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VOL. 33.

THE INTERPRETER BY G. J. WHITE

IN TWO VOLUMES

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THE
INTERPRETER

A TALE OF THE WAR

BY

G. J. WHYTE MELVILLE

AUTHOR OF "THE GLADIATORS," "DIGBY GRAND," ETC.

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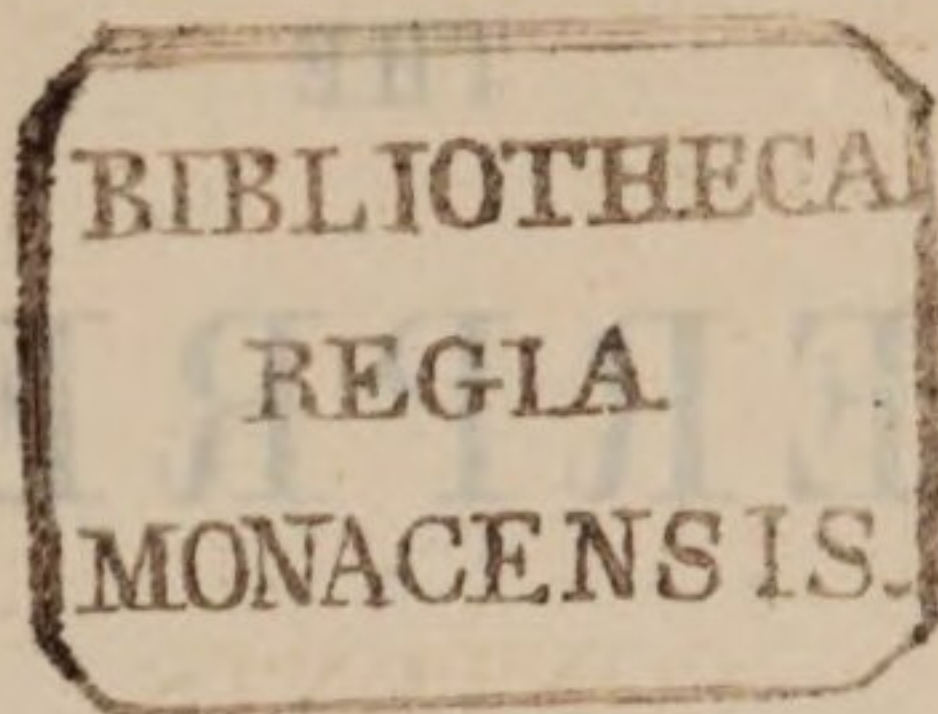
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE INTERPRETER.

CHAPTER I.

La Dame aux Camellias.

"My dear, you *must* go to this ball," said Sir Harry to his daughter, as they sat over their morning chocolate in a spacious room with a small glazed stove, very handsome, very luxurious, and *very cold*. "You have seen everything else here; you have been a good deal in society. I have taken you everywhere, although you know how 'going out' bores me; and now you refuse to go to the best thing of the year. My dear, you *must*!"

"But a masked ball, papa," urged Constance. "I never went to one in my life; indeed, if you please, I had rather not."

"Nonsense, child, everybody goes; there's your friend Countess Valérie wild about it, and Victor, and even sober Vere Egerton, but of course *he* goes in attendance on the young Countess — besides, Ropsley wishes it."

Constance flushed crimson, then grew white, and bit her lip. "Captain Ropsley's wishes have nothing to do with me, papa," said she, with more than her

usual stateliness; "I do not see what right he has to express a wish at all."

Sir Harry rose from his chair; he was getting very feeble in his limbs, though he stoutly repudiated the notion that he grew a day older in strength and spirits. He walked twice across the room, went to his daughter's chair, and took her hand in his. She knew what was coming, and trembled all over.

"My dear child," said he, with a shaky attempt at calmness, and a nervous quivering of his under lip — for loving, obedient, devoted as she was, Sir Harry stood in awe of his daughter — "you remind me I wish to speak to you on the subject of Captain Ropsley and his intimacy with ourselves. Constance, has it never occurred to you what all this must eventually lead to?"

She looked up at him with her clear shining eyes, and replied —

"It has, papa, and I quite dread the end of it."

"You know, dear, how I have encouraged him," continued her father, without noticing the unpropitious remark; "you can guess my wishes without my speaking more plainly. He is an excellent fellow — clever, popular, agreeable, and good-looking. There can be no objection, of course, on *your* side. I think your old father has not done so badly for you after all — eh, Constance?" and Sir Harry made a feeble attempt at a laugh, which stopped, and, as it were, "went out" — all of a sudden.

She looked him full in the face. Truth shone brightly in the depths of those clear eyes.

"Papa," said she, slowly and steadily, "do you

really mean you wish me to — to marry Captain Ropsley?"

"You ladies jump at conclusions very fast," answered the Baronet, still striving, shakingly, to be jocose. "*Rem acu tetigisti.* Ha, ha! I have not forgotten my Latin, or that I was young once, my dear. You have run your needle into the very heart of the matter, you little witch! That is indeed my earnest wish and intention."

He changed at once into a tone of majestic and uncompromising decision, but he only looked at her askance, and once more left his place to amble up and down the room. She never took her eye off his face.

"And suppose I should tell you, papa, that I cannot comply with your wish; that I hate and loathe the very sight of the man whom you would make my husband; that I fear and distrust his intimacy with you more than anything in the world; that I implore you, papa, dear papa, to give up this dreadful idea; that for this once, and once only, you would listen to me, be guided by me, and, at any sacrifice, that you would break immediately and for ever with that bad, reckless, unprincipled man, — what should you say then?"

She looked at him for an instant with a vague sort of half-hope in her truthful shining eyes; but it was more resignation than disappointment that clouded her face over immediately afterwards.

"Say, my dear?" answered the Baronet, gaily, but his teeth were set tight as he spoke; "why I should say that my girl was a romantic little fool,

instead of one of the cleverest women of my acquaintance; or, more likely still, I should say she was joking, in order to try her father's patience and indulgence to the utmost. Listen to me, Constance. I have reasons of my own for wishing to see you married — of course I mean well married, and safely settled in life — never mind what they are; it may be that I am getting old, and feel I have not much time to lose. Well, I have promised you to Ropsley — of course with your own consent. In these days we don't lock up our refractory children, or use force when persuasion alone is necessary. Heaven forbid!" Sir Harry said it with an expression of countenance somewhat contradictory of his language. "But I feel sure I need only point out to you what my wishes are to have your sincere co-operation. You behaved so well once before, you will behave well this time. Constance, I am not used to entreat; you cannot surely refuse me now?"

She burst into tears.

"Oh, papa," she said, "anything — anything but this."

He thought to try the old sarcastic mood that had done him good service with many a woman before.

"What, we are premature, are we, Miss Beverley? We cannot forget old days and childish absurdities. We must, of course, be more sensitive than our boyish adorer. Psha! my dear, it's perfectly absurd; why, you can see with your own eyes that Vere Egerton is hopelessly entangled with that bold Hungarian girl, and I can tell you, to my certain

knowledge, that he is to marry her forthwith. What she can see in his ugly face is more than I can make out; but this I suppose is prejudice on my part. Good Heaven! Constance, are you really afraid of seeing them together to-night. You! *my* daughter! the proud Miss Beverley!"

The old reprobate knew how to manage a woman still. He had served a long apprenticeship to the trade, and paid pretty dearly for his lessons in his time.

She did not cry now.

"Papa, I will go to the ball," was all she said; and Sir Harry thought it wiser to push matters no farther for the present.

Our little party had been established in Vienna for several weeks when the above-mentioned conversation took place; and the De Rohans were living on terms of close intimacy with the Beverleys. Ropsley made no secret of his engagement to Constance, and bestowed all the attentions of a future husband on the unwilling girl, with a tact which made escape impossible. Victor took his place as an old friend by her side, and she seemed to find the more pleasure in his society that it relieved her from the Guardsman's sarcastic though amusing conversation, and, as I once overheard her remark, with a deep sigh, "reminded her of old times." Valérie and I were, as usual, inseparable; but there was something of late in the manner of the young Countess which grated on my feelings. She was gay, volatile, demonstrative as ever; but I missed those fits of abstraction, that restless, preoccupied air which

seems so charming when we fancy we can guess the cause; and altogether I never was so much in danger of falling in love with Valérie as now, when, piqued, hopeless, and miserable, I felt I was uncared for by every one on earth — even by her. I was one too many in the party. Sir Harry seemed worldly, sharp, and in good spirits as usual. Ropsley scheming, composed, self-contained, and successful. Victor lively, careless, and like his former self again. Constance haughty and reserved, habitually silent, and preserving an exterior of icy calmness. Valérie sparkling triumphant, and *coquette* as possible. Only Bold and I were out of spirits; the old dog resenting with truly British energy the indignity of an enforced muzzle, without which no animal of his species was allowed to go at large in the streets of Vienna; whilst his master was wearied and ill at ease, tired of an aimless, hopeless life, and longing for the excitement of action, or the apathy of repose.

Such were the ingredients of the party that dined together at that well-known hotel rejoicing in the appellation of “Munsch,” on the day of the masked ball, to which all Vienna meant to go, to be mystified for pleasure, and have its secrets told and its weaknesses published for amusement.

Many were the glances of admiration cast at our table, and many, I doubt not, were the comparisons made between the stately beauty of the English-woman and the brilliant charms of her Hungarian friend. I sat next to Valérie, and opposite Miss Beverley, — the latter scarcely ever spoke to me now, and save a formal greeting when we met and

parted, seemed completely to ignore my existence; but she tolerated Bold, and the dog lay curled up under the table at her feet, keeping watch and ward over her — faithful Bold! — as he used to do long, long ago. Ropsley held forth upon the political state of Europe; and although Victor and Sir Harry expressed loudly their admiration of his sentiments, and the lucid manner in which he expressed them, I have yet reason to believe that, as he spoke in English, a very garbled and eccentric translation of his remarks reached the imperial and kingly *bureau* of police. Constance and Valérie seemed to have some secret understanding which called forth a smile even on the pale face of the former, whilst the latter was exuberant in mirth and spirits, and was ardently anticipating the pleasures of the ball. I was roused from my dreamy state of abstraction by her lively voice.

“Vere,” she exclaimed, with a sly glance across the table at her friend, “we are engaged for the first dance, you know.”

She always called me “Vere” now, in imitation of her brother.

“Are we?” was my somewhat ungallant reply. “I was not aware of it. I do not think I shall go to the ball.”

“Not go to the ball!” exclaimed Valérie; “and I have told you the colour of my dress and everything. Not go to the ball! do you hear him, Victor? do you hear him, Sir Harry? do you hear him, Captain Ropsley?”

“We can hardly believe it,” replied the latter,

with a quiet smile; "but, Countess Valérie, he does not deserve your confidence: will you not tell *us* what your dress is to be?"

"Nobody but Vere," persisted the Countess, with another arch smile at Constance; "you know he is engaged to me, at least for this evening. But he is cross and rude, and deserves to be mystified and made unhappy. But seriously, Vere, you *will* go? Ask him, Miss Beverley; he wont refuse *you*, although he is so ungallant towards *me*."

Constance looked up for a moment, and in a dry, measured voice, like a child repeating a lesson, said, "I hope you will go, Mr. Egerton;" and then resumed the study of her plate, paler and more reserved than ever.

I heard Bold's tail wagging against the floor. "What have I done to offend her?" I thought, "that she will thus scarcely even deign to speak to me." I bowed constrainedly, and said nothing; but the torture was beginning to get more severe than I could bear, and making an excuse that I should be late for the opera, whither none of my companions were going, I hurried from the table, Valérie giving me as I rose a camellia from her bouquet, and charging me to return it to her at the ball. "I shall count upon you, Vere," she said, as I adjusted it in my coat, "and keep myself disengaged."

I threaded my way through the dirty streets to the opera. I ensconced myself in the corner of the De Rohan's box; and resting my head on my hand, I began to reflect for the first time for many weeks on my position and my prospects. I could not con-

ceal from myself that I was no longer justified in living on the terms of intimacy with Victor and his sister, which had so long constituted such an agreeable distraction in my life. It was evident that Valérie considered me in the light of something more than a friend, and it was due to the lady, to her brother, and to myself, that such a misconception should be rectified at once and for ever. I was well aware in my heart of hearts that Constance Beverley was still, as she would always be, the idol of my life, but I was too proud to confess this even to myself. It was evident that *she* cared no longer for the friend of her childhood, that *she* was totally indifferent as to what became of the nameless, ill-starred adventurer who had once presumed to ask her to be *his*; and I ground my teeth as I told myself I was too proud, far too proud, to care for any woman that did not care for me. But I could not lead this life of inaction and duplicity any longer. No, I was well now, I was able to walk again (and I thought of my gentle nurse with a sigh). I would *not* go to the ball to-night; I would leave Vienna to-morrow; it was far better not to see Miss Beverley again, better for *me* at least, and ought I not to consult my own interest first? Others were selfish. I would be selfish too! Even Valérie, I had no doubt, was just like all other women; she wouldn't care, not she! And yet she was a frank, open-hearted girl, too. Poor Valérie! And mechanically I placed the camellia she had given me to my lips, and raised my eyes to examine the house for the first time since my entrance.

What was my surprise to remark the action I have just described imitated exactly by a lady in a box opposite mine, but whose face was so turned away from me, and so masked, moreover, by a bouquet she held in her hand, that I could not identify her features, or even make out whether she was young or old, handsome or plain? All I could see was a profusion of rich brown hair, and a well-turned arm holding the bouquet aforesaid, with the odours of which she seemed much gratified, so perseveringly did she apply it to her face. After a short interval, I adjusted my opera-glass, and took a long survey of the flower-loving dame. As soon as she was sure she had attracted my attention, she once more applied the white camellia to her lips with much energy and fervour, still, however, keeping her face as far as possible turned away from me, and shaded by the curtains of her box. Three times this absurd pantomime was enacted. So strong a partiality for so scentless a flower as the camellia could not be accidental; and at last I made up my mind that, in all probability, she mistook me for somebody else, and would soon find out her error without my giving myself any further trouble on the subject. I had too much to occupy my own mind to distress myself very long about the *Dame aux Camellias*; and I turned my attention to the stage, to seek relief, if only for half an hour, from the thoughts that were worrying at my heart.

The ballet of *Sattinella* was being enacted, and a man must have been indeed miserable who could entirely withdraw his attention from the magnificent

figure of Marie Taglioni, as she bounded about in the character of that fire-born Temptress, a very impersonation of grace, symmetry, beauty, and *diablerie*. The moral of the piece is very properly not developed till the end, and it is too much to expect of a human heart that it shall sympathise with the unfortunate victim of Satan's charming daughter, as long as his tortures are confined to performing wondrous bounds towards the footlights in her fiendish company, and resting her diabolical form upon his knee in the most graceful and bewitching attitude that was ever invented below, and sent up expressly for the delectation of a Viennese audience. Neither did I think the "first male dancer" very much to be pitied when he was inveigled into a beautiful garden by moonlight, where he discovered the whole *corps de ballet* arranged in imitation of statues, in the most fascinating of *poses plastiques*, and so well drilled as scarcely even to wink more than the very marble it was their part to represent. Soft music playing the whole time, and fountains, real fountains, spouting and splashing the entire depth of the stage, constituted the voluptuous accessories of the scene, and it was not till the senses of the spectators had been thoroughly entranced by beauty and melody — by all that could fascinate the eye and charm the ear, that the whole *spectacle* changed to one of infernal splendour; the fountains becoming fireworks, the pure and snowy statues turning to gorgeous she-devils of the most diabolical beauty and fierceness, whilst Sattinella herself, appearing in a bewitching costume of crim-

son and flames, carried off the bewildered victim of her blandishments, to remain bound to her for ever in the dominions of her satanic father.

Having once got him, it is understood that she will never let him go again, and I could not pity him very sincerely notwithstanding.

The opera was over, the company rapidly departing, and I stood alone at the stove in the crush-room, wondering why the house was not burnt down every time this beautiful ballet was performed, and speculating lazily between whiles as to whether I was ever likely to witness an opera again. I was one of the last spectators left in the house, and was preparing to depart, when a female figure, cloaked and hooded, passed rapidly under my very nose, and as she did so, pressed a camellia to her lips in a manner which admitted of no misconception as to her motive. I could not see her face, for a black satin hood almost covered it, but I recognised the rounded arm and the handsome bouquet which I had before remarked in the opposite box. Of course I gave instantaneous chase, and equally of course came up with the lady before she reached her carriage. She turned round as she placed her foot on the step, and dropped her fan upon the muddy pavement; I picked it up, and returned it to her with a bow. She thanked me in French, and whispered hurriedly, "Monsieur will be at the Redouten-Saal to-night?" I was in no humour for an adventure, and answered, "No." She repeated in a marked manner, "Yes, monsieur will be at the ball; monsieur will find him-

self under the gallery of the Emperor's band at midnight. *De grace*, monsieur will not refuse me this *rendezvous*."

"I had not intended to go," was my unavoidable reply, "but of course to please madame it was my duty to make any sacrifice. I would be at the appointed place at the appointed time."

She thanked me warmly and earnestly. "She had travelled night and day for a week, the roads were impassable, frightful, the fatigue unheard of. She had a *migraine*, she had not slept for nights, and yet she was going to this ball. I would not fail her, I would be *sure* to be there. *Adieu*, no, *au revoir*."

So the carriage drove off, splashing no small quantity of mud over my face and *toilette*. As I returned to my hotel to dress, I wondered what was going to happen *now*.

CHAPTER II.

"A Merry Masque."

It was a beautiful sight, one calculated to inspire feelings of mirth and gaiety, even in a heart ill at ease with itself. Such a ball-room as the Redouten-Saal is perhaps hardly to be seen elsewhere in Europe. Such music I will venture to say can only be heard in Vienna, where the whole population, from the highest to the lowest, seem to live only that they may dance. Everybody knows the effect of brilliant light on the animal spirits; the walls of these magnificent rooms are of a pale fawn colour, almost approaching to white — the very shade that best refracts and enhances the effect of hundreds of wax candles, shedding their soft radiance on the votaries of pleasure below. No wonder people are in good spirits; no wonder they throng the spacious halls, or parade the long galleries above, and looking down from their elevated position, pass many a pointed jest and humorous sally on the varied scene that crowds the floor below. No wonder they frequent the refreshment rooms that skirt these galleries, and flirt and talk nonsense, and quiz each other with the cumbrous vivacity of the Saxon race. When I entered from the quiet street, I was dazzled by the glare, and almost stupified by the hum of many voices, and the pealing notes of one of those

waltzes which Strauss seems to have composed expressly to remind the fallen children of Adam of their lost Paradise. From a boy music has made me melancholy — the sweeter the sadder; and although it is a morbid, unmanly feeling, which I have striven hard to overcome, it has always conquered me, it will always conquer me to the last. I felt bitterly out of place amongst these pleasure worshippers. What had I to do here, where all were merry and full of enjoyment? My very dress was out of keeping with the scene, for I was one of a very small minority in civil attire. Gorgeous uniforms, white, blue, and green, glittered all over the ball-room; for in Austria no officer now-a-days ever appears out of uniform; and as an army of six hundred thousand men is officered almost exclusively from the aristocracy, the fair ball-goers of Vienna find no lack of partners in gaudy and warlike attire. The ladies were all masked; not so their respective cavaliers, it being part of the amusement of these balls, that the gentler sex alone should appear *incognito*, and so torment their natural prey at more than their usual advantage; thus many a poisoned dart is planted, many a thrust driven securely home, without a chance of a parry or fear of a return. Though Pity is represented in a female garb, it seems to me that woman, when she does strike, strikes harder, straighter, swifter, more unsparingly than man. Perhaps she suffers as much as she inflicts, and this makes her ruthless and reckless — who knows? if so, she would rather die than acknowledge it. These are not thoughts for a ball, and yet they crowded on me

more and more as I stood under the musicians' gallery, gazing vacantly at the throng.

Victor and his party had not yet arrived. I was sure to distinguish them by Ropsley's scarlet uniform, and I was also sure that in such an assemblage of military connoisseurs the costume of Queen Victoria's bodyguard would attract observation and remark that could not pass unnoticed even by so preoccupied a spectator as myself. Besides, I knew the colour of Valérie's dress; it was to be pink, and of some fabric, beautiful exceedingly, of which I had forgotten the name as soon as told. I was consequently sure of finding them whenever I wished, so I stood quietly in my corner, and watched the crowd go by, without caring to mingle in the stream or partake of the amusements every one else seemed to find so delightful. How poor and vapid sounded the conversation of the passers-by; how strained the efforts at wit; how forced and unnatural the attempts at mystification! The Germans are too like ourselves to sustain for any length of time the artificial pace of *badinage* and repartee. It is not the genius of the nation, and they soon come to a humble jog-trot of old trite jokes, or worse still, break down completely, and stop once for all. The only man that seemed in his element was a French *attaché*, and he indeed entered into the spirit of the thing with a zest and enthusiasm of truly Parisian origin. Surrounded by masks, he kept up a fire of witticism, which never failed or diminished for an instant; like the juggler who plays with half-a-dozen balls, now one, now another, now all up in air at once.

The Frenchman seemed to ask no respite, to shrink from no emergency; he was little, he was ugly, he was not even gentlemanlike, but he was "the right man in the right place," and the ladies were enchanted with him accordingly. Surrounded by his admirers, he was at a sufficient distance for me to watch his proceedings without the risk of appearing impertinent and so I looked on, half-amused at his readiness, half disgusted with his flippancy, till I found my attention wandering once more to my own unprofitable and discontented thoughts.

"*Mouton qui rêve,*" said a voice at my elbow, so close that it made me start.

I turned rapidly round, and saw a lady standing so near that her dress touched mine, masked, of course, and thoroughly disguised in figure and appearance. Had it not been for the handsome arm and the canellia she held to her lips, I should not have recognised her as the lady I had spoken to at the door of the Opera, and who had appointed to meet me at this very spot — a *rendezvous* which, truth to tell, I had nearly forgotten.

"*Mouton qui rêve,*" she repeated, and added, in the same language, "Your dreams must be very pleasant if they can thus abstract you from all earthly considerations, even music and dancing, and your duty toward the fair sex."

"Now what *can* this woman want with me? I wish she would let me alone," was my inward thought; but my outward expression thereof was couched in more polite language.

"Dreaming! of course I was dreaming — and of

Madame; so bright a vision, that I could hardly hope ever to see it realized. I place myself at Madame's feet as the humblest of her slaves."

She laughed in my face. "Do not attempt compliments," she said, "it is not your *métier*. The only thing I like about you English is your frankness and straight-forward character. Take me upstairs. I want to speak seriously to you. Don't look so preoccupied."

At this instant I recognised Ropsley's scarlet uniform showing to great advantage on his tall person in the distance; I could not help glancing towards the part of the room in which I knew the pink dress was to be found, for the pink dress would of course have entered with Ropsley, and where the pink dress was there would be *another*, whom, after to-night, I had resolved *never, never* to see again.

My mysterious acquaintance had now hooked herself on to my arm, and as we toiled up the stairs it was necessary to say something. I said the first thing that occurred to me. "How did you know I was an Englishman?" She laughed again.

"*Not* by your French," she answered; "for without compliment, you speak it as well as I do; but who except an Englishman would go to sleep with his eyes open in such a place as this? who else would forget such a *rendezvous* as I gave you here? who else with a pretty woman on his arm (I *am* a pretty woman, though I don't mean to unmask), would be longing to get away, and hankering after a pink dress and a black dominé at the other end of

the room? You needn't wince, my friend; I know all your secrets. You were in the seventh heaven when I interrupted you. I wish you would come down to earth again."

I will not say where I wished *she* would go down to, but I answered gravely and politely enough — "It was not to tell me this you stopped your carriage after the Opera to-night; tell me how I can serve you — I am at the disposition of Madame, though I am at a loss to discover what she means by her pink dresses and black dominoes."

"I will not laugh at you for being serious," she replied. "I am serious myself now, and I shall be for the next ten minutes. Frankly, I know you; I know all about you. I know the drawing-room at Edeldorf, and I know Valérie de Rohan — don't look so frightened, your secret is safe with me. Be equally frank, Monsieur l'Interprète, and interpret something for me, under promise of secrecy. You are an Englishman," she added, hurriedly, her manner changing suddenly to one of earnestness, not unmixed with agitation; "can I depend upon you?"

"Implicitly, Madame," was my reply.

"Then, tell me why Victor de Rohan is constantly at the Hôtel Munsch with his foreign friends; tell me why he is always in attendance on that proud young lady, that frigid specimen of an English 'meess?' Is it true, I only ask you, — tell me, is it true?"

Agitated as was the questioner, her words smote home to her listener's heart. How blind I had been, living with them every day, and never to see it!

while here was a comparative stranger, one at least who, by her own account, had been absent from Vienna for weeks, and she was mistress of the details of our everyday life; she had been watching like a lynx, whilst I was sleeping or dreaming at my post; well, it mattered little which, now. The hand that held her bouquet was shaking visibly, but her voice was steady and even slightly sarcastic as she read her answer in my face, and resumed,

"What I have heard, then, is true, and Count de Rohan is indeed an enviable man. You need not say another word, Monsieur l'Interprète, I am satisfied. I thank you for your kindness. I thank you for your patience; you may kiss my hand;" and she gave it me with the air of a queen. "I am an old friend of his and of his family; I shall go and congratulate him; you need not accompany me. Adieu! good sleep and pleasant dreams to you."

I followed her with my eyes as she moved away. I saw her walk up to Victor, who had a lady in blue, Constance, of course, upon his arm. She passed close by him and whispered in his ear. He started, and I could see that he turned deadly pale. For an instant he hesitated as if he would follow her, but in a twinkling she was lost amongst the crowd, and I saw her no more that night.

I threaded my way to where Ropsley in his scarlet uniform was conversing with a knot of distinguished Austrian officers; they were listening to his remarks with attention, and here, as elsewhere, in the ball-room at Vienna as in the playground at Everdon, it seemed natural that my old schoolfellow

should take the lead. Sir Harry was by his side, occasionally putting in his word, somewhat *mal-à-propos*, for though a shrewd capable man, foreign politics were a little out of Sir Harry's depth. Behind him stood the much-talked of pink-dress; its wearer was closely masked, but I knew the flowers she held in her hand, and I thought now was the time to bid Valérie a long farewell. She was a little detached from her party, and I do not think expected me so soon, for she started when I spoke to her, but bowed in acquiescence, and put her arm within mine when I proposed to make the tour of the room with her, although, true to the spirit of a masquerade, not a word escaped her lips. I led her up to the galleries, and placed a seat for her apart from the crowd. I did not quite know how to begin, and contrary to her wont, Valérie seemed as silently disposed as myself. At last I took courage, and made my plunge. "I have asked to speak to you, to wish you good-bye," I said. "I am going away to-morrow. For my own sake I must stay here no longer. I am going back to the East. I am well now, and anxious to be on service again. I have stayed in the Fatherland far too long as it is. To-morrow at day-break Bold and I must be *en route* for Trieste." I paused; she winced, and drew in her breath quickly, but bowed her head without speaking, and I went on — "Mine has been a strange lot, and not a very happy one; and this must account to you for my reserved, unsociable conduct, my seeming ingratitude to my best and kindest friends. Believe me, I am not ungrateful, only unhappy. I might have been,

I ought to have been, a very different man. I shall to-night bid you farewell, perhaps for ever. You are a true friend; you have always borne and sympathized with me. I will tell you my history; bear and sympathize with me now. I have been a fool and an idolater all my life; but I have been at least consistent in my folly, and true in my idolatry. From my earliest boyhood there has been but one face on earth to me, and that one face will haunt me till I die. Was it my fault, that seeing her every day I could not choose but love her? that loving her I would have striven heart and soul, life and limb, to win her? And I failed. I failed, though I would have poured out my heart's blood at her feet. I failed, and yet I loved her fondly, painfully, madly, as ever. Why am I an exile from my country — a wanderer on the face of the earth — a ruined, desperate man? Why, because of her. And yet I would not have it otherwise, if I could. It is dearer to me to sorrow for her sake, than it could ever have been to be happy with another. Valérie, God forbid you should ever know what it is to love as I have done. God forbid that the feeling which ought to be the blessing and the sunshine of a life should turn to its blight and its curse! Valérie."

She was shaking all over; she was weeping convulsively under her mask: I could hear her sobs, and yet I was pitiless. I went on. It was such a relief in the selfishness of my sorrow, to pour out the pent-up grief of years, to tell any one, even that merry light-hearted girl, how bitterly I had suffered — how hopeless was my lot. It was not that I asked for

sympathy, it was not that I required pity; but it seemed a necessity of my being, that I should establish in the ears of one living witness the fact of my great sorrow, ere I carried it away with me, perhaps to my grave. And all this time the melody of the "Weintrauben" was pealing on, as if in mockery. Oh, that waltz! How often she had played it to me in the drawing-room at Beverley! Surely, surely, it must smite that cold heart even now.

My companion's sobs were less violent, but she grasped the bouquet in her hand till every flower drooped and withered with the pressure.

"Valérie," I continued, "do not think me vain or presumptuous. I speak to you as a man who has death looking him in the face. I am resolved never to return. I am no braver than my neighbours, but I have nothing on earth to live for, and I pray to die. I can speak to you now as I would not dare to speak if I thought ever to look in your face again. You have been my consoler, my sister, my friend. Oh, I could have dared to love you, Valérie; to strive for you, to win you, had I but been free. You are, perhaps, far worthier than that proud, unfeeling girl, and yet — and yet — it cannot be. Farewell, Valérie, dear Valérie; we shall never meet again. You will be happy, and prosperous, and beloved; and you will think sometimes of the poor wounded bird whose broken wing you healed, only that it might fly away once more into the storm. As for me, I have had no future for years. I live only in the past. Bold and I must begin our wanderings again to-morrow — Bold whom she used to

fondle, whom I love for her sake. It is not every man, Countess Valérie, that will sacrifice his all to an idea, and that idea a false one!"

"Stop, Vere!" she gasped out wildly; "hush, for mercy's sake, hush!"

Oh! that voice, that voice! was I dreaming? was it possible? was I mad? Still the wild tones of the "Weintrauben" swelled and sank upon mine ear; still the motley crowd down below were whirling before my sight; and as surely as I saw and heard, so surely was it Constance Beverley who laid her hand in mine, and tearing down her mask, turned upon me a look so wild, so mournful, so unearthly, that, through all my astonishment, all my confusion, it chilled me to the heart. Many a day afterwards — ay, in the very jaws of death, that look haunted me still.

"So true," she muttered; "oh, misery, misery! too late!"

"Forgive me, Miss Beverley," I resumed, bitterly, and with cold politeness; "this communication was not intended for you. I meant to bid Countess Valérie farewell. You have accidentally heard that which I would have died sooner than have told you. It would be affectation to deny it now. I shall not annoy you any further, I congratulate you on your many conquests, and wish you good-bye."

She was weeping once more, and wrung my hand convulsively.

"Vere, Vere," she pleaded, "do not be so hard upon me; so bitter, so mocking, so unlike yourself. Spare me, I entreat you, for I am *very* miserable.

You do not know how I am situated. You do not know how I have struggled. But I must not talk thus *now*."

She recovered her self-command with a strong effort, and pale as death, she spoke steadily on.

"Vere, we may not make our own lot in life; whatever is, is for the best. It is too late to think of what might have been. Vere, dear Vere, you are my brother — you can never be more to me than a dear, *dear* brother."

"Why not?" I gasped, for her words, her voice, her trembling frame, her soft, sweet, mournful looks, had raised once more a legion of hopes that I thought were buried for ever in my breast; and despite my cruel taunts, I loved her, even whilst I smote, as the fierce human heart can love, and tear, and rend, and suffer the while, far, far more keenly than its victim.

"Because I am the promised wife of another. Your friend, Count de Rohan, proposed for me this very day, and I accepted him."

She was standing up as she said it, and she spoke in a steady measured voice; but she sat down when she had finished, and tried to put her mask on again. Her fingers trembled so that she could not tie the strings.

I offered her my arm, and we went downstairs. Not a word did we exchange till we had nearly reached the place where Sir Harry was still standing talking to Victor de Rohan. Ropsley, in his scarlet uniform, was whirling away with a lady in a blue dress, whose figure I recognised at once for that of

the Countess Valérie. It was easy to discover that the young ladies, who resembled each other in size and stature, had changed dresses; and the Countess, to enhance the deception, had lent her bouquet to her friend. I was giddy and confused, like a man with his death-hurt, but pride whispered in my ear to bear it in silence and seeming unconcern.

Three paces more would bring us to Sir Harry. I should never see her again. In a short time she might perhaps read my name in the *Gazette*, and then hard, haughty, false as she was, she would like to know that I had been true to her to the last. No, I would not part with her in anger; my better angel conquered, and I wrung her hand, and whispered, "God bless you, Constance." "God bless you, Vere," she replied; and the pressure of those soft trembling fingers thrilled on mine for many a day.

I recollect but little more of that ball in the Redouten-Saal. I believe I congratulated Victor on his approaching marriage. I believe I wished Valérie good-bye, and was a little disappointed at the resignation with which she accepted my departure. I have a vague impression that even Ropsley, usually so calm, so selfish, so unsympathizing, accompanied me home, under the impression that I was ill. My mind had been overstrung, and I walked about like a man in a dream. But morning came at last, and with my cased sword under my arm, and Bold in a leash at my feet, I stood on the platform of the railway-station, waiting for the

departure of my train. An English servant in the well-known livery, touched his hat as he put a letter into my hand. Miser that I was! I would not read it till I was fairly settled in the carriage. Little thought the faded belle, with her false front, opposite me, or the fat man, with a seal-ring on his forefinger, by my side, how that scrap of paper was all my wealth on earth; but they were honest Germans, and possessed that truest of all politeness, which does as it would be done by. No inquisitive regards annoyed me during its perusal; no impertinent sympathy remarked on the tears which I am ashamed to say fell thick and fast upon it ere it closed. I have it by me now, that yellow well-worn paper. I have read those delicate womanly characters by scorching sunlight, by the faint glimmer of a picket's lantern, far away on the boundless sea, cramped and close in the stifling tent. If indeed "every bullet has its billet," and any one of them had been destined to lodge in my bosom, it must have found its way right through that fragile shield — ay, carried in with it the very words, which were ineffaceably engraven on my heart. No wonder I can remember it all. Here it is: —

"Vere, you must not judge me as men are so prone to judge women — harshly, hastily, uncharitably. We are not all frivolous, selfish, and fond of change, caring only for our amusements, our *conquests*, as you call them, and our enmities. You were bitter and cruel to me last night. Indeed, indeed, I feel you had a right to be so, Vere, I am so, so sorry for you. But you must not think

I have treated you unkindly, or with want of confidence. Remember how you have avoided me ever since we came to Vienna; remember how you have behaved to me as a stranger, or at most a mere acquaintance; how you have never once inquired about my prospects, or alluded to old times. Perhaps you were right; perhaps you felt hurt, proud, and angry; and yet, Vere, I had expected better things from *you*. Had I been in your place, I think I could have forgiven, I think I could have cared for, sympathized with, and respected one whom I was forbidden to love. If I were a man, it seems to me that I should not place happiness, however great, as the one sole aim of my existence; that I should strive to win honour and distinction, to benefit my fellow-men, and above all, to fulfil my duty, even with no higher reward here below than my own approval. Vere, when a man feels he is doing right, others think so too. I could be proud, oh so proud, of my brother. Yes, Vere, it is my turn to implore now, and I entreat you let me be a sister, a very dear sister to you. As such I will tell you all my griefs, all my doings; as such I can confide in you, write to you, think of you, pray for you, as indeed I do, Vere, every morning and evening of my life. And now let us dismiss at once and for ever the thoughts of what might have been. The past is beyond recal — the present, as you used to say, does not exist. The future none can call their own. There is but one reality in life, and that is Right. Vere, I have done right. I have followed the path of duty. Brother, I call upon you for your

help along the rough steep way; you have never failed me yet, you will not fail me now.

"You know my mother died when I was very young. Since then my father has fulfilled the duties of both parents towards his child. As I have grown older and seen more of the world, I have been better able to appreciate his affection and devotion to myself. A little girl must have been a sad clog upon a man like my dear father, a high-spirited gentleman, fond of the world, fond of society, fond of pleasure. Besides, had it not been for me, he would have married again, and he preferred to sacrifice his happiness to his child. Can I ever repay him? No. Whatever may have been his faults, he has been a kind, kind father to me. I will tell you all frankly, Vere, as this is the last time the subject can ever be mentioned between us. Had I been free to choose, I would have been yours. I am not ashamed — nay, I am *proud* to own it. But you know how impossible it was, how absolutely my father forbade it. To have disobeyed him would have been wicked and ungrateful. I feel that even you would not have respected me had I done so. But of late he has become most anxious to see me settled in life. From his own hints, and Captain Ropsley's open assertions, it seems this alone can stave off some dreadful evil. I do not understand it. I only know I am bound to do all in my power for papa; and that he is entangled with that bad, unprincipled man I feel convinced. Oh, Vere, it might have been far, far worse. In accepting Count de Rohan, I have escaped a great and fright-

ful danger. Besides, I esteem him highly, I like his society, I admire his open, honourable character. I have known him all my life; he is your oldest friend — I need not enlarge upon his merits to you. His sister, too, is a charming, frank-hearted girl. From all I heard, from all I saw, I had hoped, Vere, that she had effaced in your mind the unhappy recollections of former days. She is beautiful, accomplished, and attractive; can you wonder that I believed what I was told, and judged, besides, by what I saw? Even now we might be related. You seem to like her, and she would make any one happy. Forgive me, Vere, forgive me for the suggestion. It seems so unfeeling now, whilst I have your tones of misery ringing in my ears; and yet, Heaven knows, *your* happiness is the wish nearest my heart. Consult only *that*, and I shall be satisfied. To hear of your welfare, your success, will make me happy. I cannot, I must not write to you again. You yourself would not wish it. I ought to write no more now. I feel for you, Vere; I know how you must suffer, but the steel must be tempered in the fire, and it is through suffering that men learn to be great and good. There are other prizes in life besides happiness. There is an hour coming for us all, when even the dearest and closest will have to part. May we both be ready when that hour arrives. And now it is time to bid the long farewell; our paths in life must henceforth be separate. Do not think unkindly of me, Vere; I may not be with you, but I may be proud of you, and wish you every happiness. Forget me — yet

not altogether. Dear, *dear* brother, God bless you! and farewell!

"Take care of poor Bold."

So it was really over at last. Well, and what then? Had it not been over, to all intents and purposes, long ago? Yes, there was something worth living for, after all. There was no bitterness now, for there was nothing to hope; the cup had been drained to the dregs, and the very intoxication of the draught had passed away, but it had invigorated the system and given new life to the heart. It was much to feel that I had been valued and appreciated by such a woman—much to know that my name would never fall unmeaningly on her ear. And I would be worthy, I would never fail. The sacrifice should be perfected. And though I might never see her again on earth, I would preserve her image pure and unsullied in my heart of hearts. Constance Beverley should henceforth and for ever be my ideal of all that was purest and noblest and best beloved in woman.

CHAPTER III.

The Golden Horn.

"JOHNNY, want to see the bazaar?" The speaker was a Greek of the lowest class, depraved and dirty, with a flexibility of limb and cunning of countenance only to be seen in the present representatives of that race who once furnished the sculptor with his glorious ideal of godlike strength and intellectual beauty. I longed to kick him — the climate of Constantinople is provocative of irritation, and I felt that with my bushy beard, my Oriental demeanour, my acquaintance with Turkish habits and proficiency in the language, it was irritating to be called "Johnny," and asked to "see the bazaar," as though I had been the smoothest and ruddiest ensign, disembarked for a day's leave from yonder crowded troop-ship, an innocent lamb frisking in the sun on my way up to the shambles before Sebastopol.

Yes, I was pretty well acclimatized in Turkey now. A year and more had passed over my head since I had left Vienna, the morning after that memorable ball at the Redouten-Saal, and what changes had that year brought forth! Sir Harry Beverley was gathered to his fathers, and an investigation into that worthy gentleman's affairs had explained much that was hitherto incomprehensible in his conduct as to his daughter's marriage and his connexion with

Ropsley. The latter had played his game scientifically throughout. He was aware that on a proper settlement being made, by marriage or otherwise, for his daughter, Sir Harry would obtain the fee-simple of certain property which, until such an event, he only held in trust for the young lady's benefit; and as these were the sole funds to which the far-seeing Guardsman could look to liquidate Sir Harry's debts to himself, incurred no one knew exactly how, it was his object to expedite as speedily as possible the marriage of my early love. As she was an heiress he would have had no objection to wed her himself, and indeed, as we have already seen, had entered into terms with her father for the furtherance of this object. That scheme was, however, defeated by her own determination, and it had long been apparent to my mind that Constance had only married my old friend Victor to escape from the dreadful alternative of becoming Ropsley's wife: that such an alliance promised but ill for the future happiness of both, I could not conceal from myself, and yet so selfish is the human heart, so difficult is it to shake the "trail of the serpent" from off the flowrets of our earthly love, I could not regret as I ought to have done that the two people whom most I cared for in the world, should not be as devoted to each other as is essential to the happiness of those whom the tie of marriage has bound indissolubly together.

Ah! she was Countess de Rohan now, living at Edeldorf in all that state and luxury which she was so well calculated to adorn; and I, what had I done since we parted for ever at the masquerade? Well,

I had striven to fulfil her wishes — to rise to honour and distinction, to be worthy of her friendship and esteem. Fame I had gained none, but I had done my duty. Omar Pasha, my kind patron, who had never forgotten the child that sympathized with him at Edeldorf, had expressed himself satisfied with my services; and Skender Bey, drunk or sober, never passed me without a cordial grasp of the hand. For more than a year I had shared the fortunes of the Turkish commander and the Turkish army. I had seen the merits of those poor, patient, stanch, unflinching troops, and the shortcomings of their corrupt and venal officers. I knew, none better, how the Turkish soldier will bear hunger, thirst, privation, ill-usage, and arrears of pay, without a murmur; how, with his implicit faith in destiny, and his noble self-sacrifice in the cause of God and the Sultan, he is capable of endurance and effort such as put the ancient Spartan to the blush — witness the wan faces, the spectral forms, gaunt, famine-stricken and hollow-eyed, that so doggedly carried out the behests of the tameless defender of Kars. I had seen him starved and cheated that his colonel might gormandize — ay! and in defiance of the Prophe, drink to intoxication of the forbidden liquid, — and I wondered not, as none who knew the nation need wonder, that Russian gold will work its way to the defeat of a Turkish army far more swiftly than all the steel that bristles over the thronging columns of the Muscovite. Keep the Pasha's hands clean, or make it worth his while to be faithful to his country — forbid the northern eagle from spreading his wing over the Black Sea,

and you may trust the Turkish soldier that not a Russian regiment ever reaches the gates of Constantinople. All this I had seen, and for long I was content to cast in my lot with this brave people, struggling against the invader; but my own countrymen were in arms scarce two hundred miles off, the siege of Sebastopol was dragging wearily on from day to day — I felt that I would fain be under the dear old English flag, would fain strike one blow surrounded by the kindly English faces, cheered by the homely English tongues. She was more likely to hear of me, too, if I could gain some employment with the English army; and this last argument proved to me too painfully what I had vainly striven to conceal from myself, how little these long months of trials, privations, and excitement had altered the real feelings of my heart. Would it be always so? Alas, alas! it was a weary lot!

"Johnny, want to see the bazaar?" He woke me from my day-dream, but I felt more kindly towards him now, more cosmopolitan, more charitable. In such a scene as that, how could any man, a unit in such a throng, think only of his own individual interests or sufferings?

Never since the days of the Crusaders — ay, scarcely even in that romantic time, was there seen such a motley assemblage as now crowded the wooden bridge that traverses the Golden Horn between bustling, dirty, *dissonant* Pera, and stately, quiet, dignified Stamboul, those two suggestive quarters that constitute the Turkish capital. On that bridge might be

seen a specimen of nearly every nation under the sun — the English soldier with his burly, upright figure, and staid, well-disciplined air; the rakish Zouave, with his rollicking gait, and professed libertinism of demeanour, foreign to the real character of the man. Jauntily he sways and swaggers along, his hands thrust into the pockets of his enormous red petticoat trousers, his blonde hair shaved close, “à la Khabyle,” and his fair complexion burnt red by an African sun, long before he came here, “en route, voyez-vous,” to fill the ditch of the Malakhoff. “Pardon,” he observes to a tall, stately Persian fresh from Astracan, whom he jostles unwittingly, for a Frenchman is never impolite, save when he really *intends* insult; — the fire-worshipper, in his long sad-coloured robes and high-pointed cap, wreathes his aquiline features into an expression of stately astonishment, — for a Persian, too, has his notions of good-breeding, and is extremely punctilious in acting up to them. His picturesque costume, however, and dignified bearing are lost upon the Zouave, for a gilded araba is at the moment passing, with its well-guarded freight, and the accursed Giaour ogles these flowers of the harem with an impudent pertinacity of truly Parisian growth. The beauties, fresh from their bath, attempt, with henna-tinted fingers, to draw their thin veils higher over their radiant features, their bed-gown-looking dresses tighter round their plump forms; an arrangement which by some fatality invariably discloses the beauties of face and figure more liberally than before. Here a Jew, in his black dress and solemn turban, is counting his gains attentively

on his fingers; there an Armenian priest, with square cap and long dusky draperies, tells his prayers upon his sandal-wood beads. A mad dervish, naked to the loins, his hair knotted in elf-locks, his limbs macerated by starvation, howls out his unearthly dirge, to which nobody seems to pay attention, save that Yankee skipper, in a round hat, fresh from Halifax to Balaclava, who is much astonished, if he would only confess it, and who sets down in his mental log-book all that he sees and hears in this strange country as an "almighty start." Italian sailors, speaking as much with their fingers as their tongues, call perpetually on the Virgin; whilst Greeks, Maltese, and Ionian islanders scream, and gesticulate, and jabber, and cheat whenever and however they can. Yonder an Arab from the desert stalks grim and haughty, as though he trod the burning sands of his free, boundless home. Armed to the teeth, the costly shawl around his waist bristling with pistols and sword and deadly yataghan, he looks every inch the tameless war-hawk whose hand is against every man, and every man's hand against him. Preoccupied is he, though, and ill at ease, for he has left his steed in a stable from whence he feels no certainty that priceless animal may not be stolen ere he returns; and should he lose his horse, what will his very life avail him then? Nevertheless, he can sneer bitterly on that gigantic Ethiopian — a slave, of course, — who struts past him in all the borrowed importance of a great man's favourite. At Constantinople, as at New Orleans — in the City of the Sultan as in the Land of the Free, the swarthy skin, the flattened

features, and the woolly hair of the negro denote the slave. That is a tall, stalwart fellow though, and would fetch his price in South Carolina fast enough, were he put up for sale to the highest bidder. Such a lot he need not dread here, and he leads some half-dozen of his comrades, like himself, splendidly dressed and armed, with a confident, not to say bellicose, air, that seems to threaten all by-standers with annihilation if they do not speedily make way for his master the Pasha. And now the Pasha himself comes swinging by at the fast easy walk of his magnificent Turkish charger, not many crosses removed from the pure blood of the desert. The animal seems proud of its costly accoutrements, its head-stall embossed with gold and housings sown with pearls, nor seems inclined to flag or waver under the goodly weight it carries so jauntily. A gentleman of substantial proportions is the Pasha; broad, strong, and corpulent, with the quiet, contented air of one whose habitual life is spent amongst subordinates and inferiors. He is a true Turk, and it is easy to trace in his gestures and demeanour — haughty, grave, and courteous — the bearing of the dominant race. His stout person is buttoned into a tight blue frock-coat, on the breast of which glitters the diamond Order of the Medjidjie, and a fez or crimson skull-cap, with a brass button in the crown, surmounts his broad, placid face, clean and close shaved, all but the carefully-trimmed black moustache. A plain scimitar hangs at his side, and the long chibouques, with their costly amber mouthpieces, are carried by the pipe-bearer in his rear. The cripple asking for alms

at his horse's feet narrowly escapes being crushed beneath its hoofs; but in Turkey nobody takes any trouble about anybody else, and the danger being past, the cripple seems well satisfied to lie basking in the sun on those warm boards, and wait for his destiny, like a true Mussulman as he is. Loud are the outcries of this Babel-like throng; and the porters of Galata stagger by under enormous loads, shouting the while with stentorian lungs, well adapted to their Herculean frames. Water-carriers and sweet-meat-venders vie with each other in proclaiming the nature of their business in discordant tones; a line of donkeys, bearing on their patient backs long planks swaying to and fro, are violently addressed by their half-naked drivers in language of which the poetic force is equalled only by the energetic enunciation; and a string of Turkish firemen, holloaing as if for their lives, are hurrying — if an Osmanli can ever be said to hurry — to extinguish one of those conflagrations which periodically depopulate Pera and Stamboul.

The blue sparkling water, too, is alive with traffic, and is indeed anything but a "silent highway." Graceful caïques, rowed by their lightly-clad watermen — by far the most picturesque of all the dwellers by the Bosphorus — shoot out in all directions from behind vessels of every rig, and every tonnage; the boatmen screaming, of course, on every occasion, at the very top of their voices. All is bustle, confusion, and noise; but the tall black cedars in the gardens of the Seraglio-palace tower, project into the blue cloudless sky, solemn and immovable, for there is not a breath

of air stirring to fan the scorching noon, and the domes and minarets of Stamboul's countless mosques glitter white and dazzling in the glare. It is refreshing to watch the ripple yonder on the radiant Bosphorus, where the breeze sighs gently up from the Sea of Marmora — alas! we have not a chance of it elsewhere; and it is curious to observe the restless white sea-fowl, whom the Turks believe to be the lost souls of the wicked, scouring ever along the surface of the waters, seemingly without stay or intermission, during the livelong day. It is ominous, too; mark that enormous vulture poised aloft on his broad wing, like a shadow of evil impending over the devoted city. There are few places in the world so characteristic as the bridge between Galata* and Stamboul.

And now the traffic is brought to a stand-still, for the huge fabric has to be opened, and swings back on its hinges for the passage of some mighty craft moving slowly on to the inner harbour to refit. It is a work of time and labour: the former article is of considerably less value to our Moslem friends than the latter, and is lavished accordingly; but though business may be suspended for the nonce, noise increases tenfold, every item of the throng deeming the present an opportune moment at which to deliver his, her, or its opinion on things in ge-

* The suburb of Pera lying next the Bosphorus, a locality combining the peculiarities of our own Smithfield, St. Giles's, and Billingsgate in their worst days. There is another bridge across the Golden Horn, higher up; but its traffic, compared to that of its neighbour, is as that of Waterloo to London Bridge.

neral. Nimble fingers roll the fragrant cigarette, and dissonant voices rise above the white spiral smoke into the clear bright air. Close behind me I recognise the well-known Saxon expletive adjuring *Johnny* to "drive on," — said "Johnny" invariably returning a blessing for a curse; but "driving on," if by that expression is meant activity and progress, as little as may be. Turning round, I confront a florid Saxon face, with bushy beard and whiskers, surmounting a square form that somehow I think I have seen before. "Scant greeting serves in time of strife," and taking my chance of a mistake, I salute my neighbour politely.

"Mr. Manners, I believe? I am afraid you do not recollect me."

"*Major* Manners, sir; *Major* Manners — very much at your service," is the reply, in a tone of mild correction. "No; I confess you have the advantage of me. And yet — can it be? Yes, it is — Vere Egerton!"

"The same," I answered, with a cordial grasp of the hand; "but it is strange we should meet here, of all places in the world."

"I always told you I was born to be a soldier, Egerton," said the usher, with his former jaunty air of good-humoured bravado; "and here I am amongst the rest of you. Bless me, how you're grown! I should not have known you had you not spoken to me. And I — don't you think I am altered, eh? improved, perhaps, but certainly altered — what?"

I glanced over my friend's dress, and agreed with him most cordially as to the *alteration* that had taken

place in his appearance. The eye gets so accustomed to difference of costume at Constantinople, that it is hardly attracted by any eccentricity of habit, however uncommon; but when my attention was called by Manners himself to his exterior, I could not but confess that he was apparelled in a style of gorgeous magnificence, such as I had never seen before. High black riding boots of illustrious polish, with heavy steel spurs that would have become Prince Rupert; crimson pantaloons under a bright green tunic, single-breasted, and with a collar *à la guillotine*, that showed off to great advantage the manly neck and huge bushy beard, but at the same time suggested uncomfortable ideas of sore throats and gashing sabre-strokes; a sash of golden tissue, and a swordbelt, new and richly embroidered, sustaining a cavalry sabre nearly four feet long, — all this was more provocative of admiration than envy; but when such a *tout ensemble* was surmounted by a white beaver helmet with a red plume, something of a compromise between the head-dress of the champion at Astley's and that which is much affected by the Prince Consort, the general effect, I am bound to confess, became striking in the extreme.

"I see," said I; "I admire you very much; but what is it? — the uniform, I mean. Staff corps? Land Transport? What?"

"Land Transport, indeed!" replied Manners, indignantly. "Not a bit of it — nothing half so low. The Bashi-Bazouks — Beatson's Horse — whatever you like to call them. Capital service — excellent

pay — the officers a jovial set of fellows; and really — eh now? confess, a magnificent uniform. Come and join us, Egerton — we have lots of vacancies; it's the best thing out."

"And your men?" I asked, for I had heard something of these Bashi-Bazouks and their dashing leader. "What sort of soldiers are they? — can you depend upon them?"

"I'd lead them anywhere," replied my enthusiastic friend, whose experience of warfare was as yet purely theoretical. "The finest fellows you ever saw; full of confidence in their officers, and such horsemen! Talk of your English dragoons! why, *our* fellows will ride up to a brick wall at a gallop, and pull up dead short; pick a glove off the ground from the saddle, or put a bullet in it when going by as hard as they can lay legs to the ground. You should really see them under arms. *My opinion is*, they are the finest cavalry in the world."

"And their discipline?" I continued, knowing as I did something of these wild Asiatics and their predatory and irregular habits.

"Oh, discipline!" answered my embryo warrior; "bother the discipline! we mustn't begin by giving them too much of that; besides, it's nonsense to drill those fellows, it would only spoil their *dash*. They behave very well in camp. I have been with them now six weeks, and we have only had one row yet."

"And was that serious?" I asked, anxious to obtain the benefit of such long experience as my friend's.

"Serious" — replied Manners, thoughtfully; "well, it was serious; pistols kept popping off, and I thought at one time things were beginning to look very ugly, but the chief soon put them to rights. They positively adore him. I don't know whether he punished the ringleaders. However," added he, brightening up, "you must expect these sort of things with Irregulars. It was the first time I ever was shot at, Egerton; it's not half so bad as I expected: we are all dying to get into the field. Hollo! they have shut the bridge again, and I must be getting on. Which way are you going — to the Seraskerât? Come and dine with me to-day at Messirie's — Salaam!"

And Manners strutted off, apparently on the best of terms with himself, his uniform, and his Bashi-Bazouks. Well! he, too, had embarked on the stormy career of war. It was wonderful how men turned up at Constantinople, on their way to or from the Front. It seemed as if society in general had determined on making an expedition to the East. Dandies from St. James's-street were amusing themselves by amateur soldiering before Sebastopol, and London fine ladies were to be seen mincing about on the rugged stones of Pera, talking bad French to the astonished Turks with a confidence that was truly touching. It was Europe invading Asia once more, and I could not always think Europe showed to advantage in the contrast. A native Turk, calm, dignified, kindly, and polite, is a nobler specimen of the human race than a bustling French barber or a greedy German Jew; and of the two latter classes

Pera was unfortunately full even to overflowing. Well, it was refreshing to have crossed the bridge at last — to have left behind one the miserable attempt at Europeanism, the dirt, the turmoil, and the discomfort of Pera, for the quiet calm, the stately seclusion, and the venerable magnificence of Stamboul.

CHAPTER IV.

The Seraskerât.

TRUE Believers were thronging in and out of the great mosque of St. Sophia, pious in the consciousness of their many prostrations, rigorous in their observance of the hour of prayer. A *mollah* was shouting from one of the minarets, calling north, south, east, and west on all the faithful servants of the Prophet to offer up their daily orisons; and the infidel, as we term him, responded zealously to the call. Business was drowsily nodding in the bazaar; and the tradesman, sitting cross-legged on his counter, pointed feebly with his pipe towards the rich wares which his customer seemed barely to have energy to select. Slipshod Turkish ladies, accompanied by their negro damsels, were tripping slowly home from the bath, peeping at the Giaour through the thin folds of their *yashmaks* with curiosity not untempered by scorn. Pot-bellied children, pashas in miniature, holding up their garments with one hand, whilst they extended the henna-dyed fingers of the other, waddled after the stranger, now spitting at him with precocious fanaticism, now screaming out something about "Bono Johnny" and "Para," in unseemly cupidity for an alms. Dogs, gorged and sleepy, the recognised scavengers of the streets, lay coiled up in each shady corner and recess. Every-

thing betokened somnolence and repose. The very sentry at the gate of the Seraskerât had laid his musket carefully aside, and was himself leaning against the wall in an attitude of helpless resignation and imbecility. My Turkish uniform, and his knowledge of my person as attached to the staff of Omar Pasha, served somewhat to arouse him; but ere he was fairly under arms I was already in the inner court of the Seraskerât, and beyond reach of his challenge or his salute. What a contrast did it present to our own Horse-Guards, to which office it is a corresponding institution! Notwithstanding our boasted superiority, notwithstanding the proverbial supineness and indolence of the Sultan's officials, the comparison was hardly in favour of our London head-quarters for the hindrance of military affairs. Here was no helpless messenger, whose business it seems to be to *know nothing*, and who answering every question with the unfailing "I will go and inquire," disappears and is seen no more. Here was no supercilious clerk, whose duty would appear to enjoin concealment of all he *does* know, and an imperative necessity of throwing difficulties in everybody's way. Here was no lingering for hours in an ante-room, to obtain a five minutes' interview of authoritative disapprobation, on the one hand, and submissive disappointment on the other. On the contrary, at the foot of the stairs leading to the Seraskier's apartments were collected a posse of bustling, smart attendants, all alive and willing to assist in whatever was going on. Foreign officers, chiefly Hungarians, passed to and fro in eager con-

clave or thoughtful meditation. Interpreters were on the alert to solve a difficulty, and well-bred, active horses, stood saddled and bridled, ready to start at a moment's notice with an order or a despatch. A knavish dragoman was jabbering bad Italian to a Jewish-looking individual, who I concluded must be a contractor; and a tall colonel of Turkish cavalry rolling a cigarette in his brown, well-shaped fingers, stood looking on in dignified indifference, as if he understood every word of their conversation, but considered it immeasurably beneath his haughty notice.

I sent up my name by a slim-waisted young officer, a Turk of the modern school, with long hair and varnished boots, over which, however, he was forced to wear India-rubber goloshes, that on going into the presence of a superior he might pay the indispensable compliment of uncovering his feet; and almost ere I had followed him three steps upstairs he had returned, and informing me that I was expected, held aside the curtain, under which I passed into the presence of the Seraskier.

Again, how unlike the Horse-Guards! the room, thought somewhat bare of furniture, was gorgeously papered, painted, and decorated, in the florid style of French art; a cut-glass chandelier hung from the centre of the ceiling, and richly-framed mirrors adorned the walls. From the windows the eye travelled over the glorious Bosphorus, with its myriads of shipping, to the Asiatic shore, where beautiful Scutari, with its background of hills and cypresses, smiled down upon the waters now gleam-

ing like a sheet of burnished gold. A low divan covered with velvet cushions and costly shawls stretched round three sides of the apartment, and on this divan were seated in solemn conclave the greatest general of the day and the Seraskier or Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Army.

Some knotty point must have been under discussion before I entered, for Omar Pasha's brow was perplexed and clouded, and a dead silence, interrupted only by the bubble of the Seraskier's *narghileh*, reigned between the two. The latter motioned me courteously to seat myself by the side of my chief; an attendant brought me a spoonful of sweetmeat, a tiny cup of strong, thick coffee, and an amber-tipped chibouque adorned with priceless diamonds, and filled with tobacco such as the houris will offer to the true believer in Paradise. I knew my assistance would soon be required; for although Omar Pasha is a good Turkish scholar, few men save those to whom it is almost a mother-tongue can converse fluently for any length of time with a Turk in his own language: so I smoked in silence and waited patiently till I was wanted.

True to the custom of the country, Omar Pasha resumed the conversation in an indifferent tone, by a polite inquiry after his excellency's health, "which must have suffered from his exertions in business during the late heats."

To this his excellency replied, "that he had been bled, and derived great benefit from it; but that the sight of his highness, Omar Pasha, had

done him more good than all the prescriptions of the *Hakim*."

A long silence, broken only as before; Omar Pasha, who does not smoke, waxing impatient, but keeping it down manfully.

The Seraskier at length remarked, without fear of contradiction, that "his highness was exceedingly welcome at Constantinople," and that "God is great."

Such self-evident truths scarcely furnished an opening for further comment, but Omar Pasha saw his opportunity, and took advantage of it.

"Tell the Seraskier," said he to me, as being a more formal manner of acknowledging his courtesy, "that his welcome is like rain on a parched soil; that Constantinople is the paradise of the earth, but the soldier ought not to leave his post, and I must return to the army, taking with me those supplies and arrears of pay of which I stand in need."

All this I propounded in the florid hyperbole of the East.

"Assuredly," answered the Seraskier, a stout, sedate, handsome personage, who looked as if nothing could ruffle or discompose him, and was therefore the very man for the place, — "Assuredly, the beard of his highness overflows with wisdom; there is but one God."

This was undeniable, but hardly conclusive; Omar Pasha came again to the attack.

"I have made a statement of my wants, and the supplies of arms, ammunition, and money, that I require. The army is brave, patient, and faithful; they

are the children of the Sultan, and they look to their father to be fed and clothed. That statement has been forwarded to your excellency through the proper channels. When the children ask for bread and powder to fight the accursed 'Muscov,' what is their general to reply?"

"Bakaloum" (we shall see), answered the Seraskier, perfectly unmoved. "If your highness's statement has been duly forwarded, doubtless it has reached our father the Sultan, with the blessing of God. Our father is all-powerful; may he live for a thousand years."

Omar Pasha began to lose patience.

"But have you not seen and read it yourself?" he exclaimed, with rising colour; "do you not acknowledge the details? do you not know the urgency of our wants? have you not taken measures for supplying them?"

The Seraskier was driven into a corner, but his *sang froid* did not desert him for a moment.

"I have seen the statement," said he, "and it was cleverly and fairly drawn up. The war is a great war, and it has great requirements. By the blessing of God, the armies of the faithful will raze the walls of Sebastopol, and drive the 'Moscov' into the sea. Kismet — it is destiny, praise be to Allah!"

"Before I set foot on board ship, before I leave the quay at Tophana, I must have those supplies shipped and ready to sail," urged Omar Pasha, now thoroughly roused, and showing his European energy in strong contrast to the Oriental apathy of the

other; "I cannot proceed without them, I must have them by the end of the month. Orders must be sent out to-night — will you promise me this?"

"Bakaloum" (we shall see), replied the Seraskier, and after a few unmeaning compliments the audience ended, and I accompanied my chief downstairs into the Courtyard of the Seraskerât.

"And this, my dear Egerton," said he, as he mounted his horse to proceed to his own quarters, "is one of the many difficulties with which I have to contend. Nobody knows anything — nobody cares for anything — nobody *does* anything. If we had but a Government, if we were not paralysed, why with such an army as mine I could have done much. As it is, we are worse than useless. If the men have no shoes, no powder, no bread, and I apply to the authorities, as I have done to-day, it is "Bakaloum" (we shall see). We shall indeed see some fine morning when the troops have all deserted, or are starved to death in their tents. Every official, high and low, seems only to look out for himself; what is there for us but to follow the example? And yet what chances lost! what an army thrown away!"

"But the Allies will soon take the place," I remarked, wishing to look on the bright side of things if possible, "and then our plan of a campaign is feasible enough. We shall sweep the whole of the Crimea, and strike him such a blow in Asia as will cripple our old friend the 'Rusky' for many a long day."

Omar smiled and shook his head. "Too many

masters, friend Egerton," he replied; "too many masters. The strings are pulled in Paris, and London — ay, and in Vienna too. Diplomats who do not know their own business are brought forward to teach us ours, and what is a General to do? There should be but one head to two hands. Here we have it all the other way. No, no, it is all 'Bakaloum' together, and we must make the best of it! I will send for you to-morrow if I want you."

As he rode away in his long dark overcoat and crimson fez, I looked after his manly, nervous figure and thought to myself what a commander would that have been in any other service in the world. Had he but chanced to be born a Pole instead of a Croat would the Danube still form a line of demarcation between the eagle and its prey? Would the Sultan be even now basking in beauty and revelling in champagne amongst the enervating delights of the Seraglio gardens? Would the balance of power in Europe be still held in equipoise? and the red flag, with its star and crescent, still flaunt over the thronging masts of the Golden Horn?

Several of my old acquaintances crowded round me ere I left the court-yard of the Seraskerât, welcoming me back to Constantinople, and eager to learn all the thrilling news of the day; every man believing every other to be better informed than himself as to all that was going on in the front. I could gratify them but little, as my duty had now for some considerable period removed me from the scene of active operations. Truth to tell, I longed ardently to be in the field once more.

Amongst others, my old comrade, Ali Mesrour, the Beloochee, touched me on the shoulder and greeted me with the heartfelt cordiality that no Asiatic ever assumes save with a fast and well-trying friend. The last time I had seen him he was engaged with some half-dozen Cossacks on the heights above Baidar, in the most romantic portion of the Crimea. He had kept them gallantly at lance's length for more than ten minutes, and made his escape after all, wounded in two places, and leaving three of his enemies dismounted on the field. Then he was ragged, jaded, dirty, and half-starved, for we were all on short rations about that time; now I should hardly have recognised him, sleek, handsome, and debonair, dressed, moreover, with unparalleled magnificence, and carrying, as is the custom of these warriors, all his worldly wealth in the jewelled hilt of his dagger, the mounting of his pistols, and the costly shawls that protected his head and wound about his middle. He seized my right hand, and pressed it to his heart, his eyes, and his forehead: then poured forth a volume of welcomes in the picturesque language of the East.

Could I do less than ask after the welfare of Zuleika, the gallant animal to whom I owed liberty and life?

"Allah has preserved her," replied the Beloochee, "and she is now in a stable not far from this spot. Her skin is sleek and fair; she is still my soul, and the corner of my heart."

"May she live a thousand years," was my comment; "to her and her master I am indebted for

being here now. She is one of the best friends I ever had."

The Beloochee's eyes sparkled at the recollection.

"It was a favourable night," — he answered — "and destiny was on our side. The dog of a Cossack! What filth I made him devour! How he rolled in the dust, and gasped at the kisses of my sharp knife! The Effendi rode in pain and weakness, but Allah strengthened him. The Effendi can walk now as well as when he left his mother's side."

We were strolling together down one of the shady narrow streets that lead to the water's edge, for I was on my return to Pera, and the Beloochee, in his delight at meeting his old comrade, would not suffer me to proceed alone. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and the scorching heat which had reigned all day was at last tempered with the breeze from the Black Sea. Oh! blessings on that breeze from the north! Without it how could we have endured the stifling atmosphere of Roumelia in the dog-days? By one of those wonderful arrangements of nature, which, after all (being accounted for on natural principles), would be far more wonderful were they not so, this welcome air began to blow every day at the same hour. I used to look for it as for the coming of a friend. If he was not with me at half-past three, he was sure not to be later than five-and-twenty minutes to four; and when he did come, I received him with bare brow and open arms. Ere we reached the bridge, the climate, from being well-

nigh unbearable had become delightful, and all the inhabitants of Constantinople seemed to have turned out to drink in new life at every pore, and enjoy the unspeakable refreshment of a lowered temperature, till the dews should fall and the sun go down.

As we neared the water's edge, my companion started and turned perfectly livid, as if labouring under some fearfully strong emotion. True to his self-command, however, he allowed no other outward sign to betray his feelings. In front of us walked a Turkish lady, closely veiled of course, and accompanied by a female negro slave. Following the beautiful creature, as observed by the lady's dress and demeanour, that she was of high rank, and in all probability the property of some great man, and Fasha at least, that she had a black attendant armed no inferiority on the part of the mistress as it does now. It is only since the peace of '66 that the negro woman has been at such a discount in Istanbul as to fill every corner of the streets with her lamentations, looking in vain for a purchaser, a master, and a home. By one of those sudden falls in the value of a strong, serviceable article, which had hitherto commanded a fair and remunerative price, is to be found the usual in the enterprise of speculators, and the forcible tendencies of an unfeeling public. The far-seeing slave-dealers who provide the Turkish market with Circassian wares had no difficulty in foretelling that the Treaty of Paris would abandon to their fate those gallant mountaineers of the Ca-

CHAPTER V.

A Turk's Harem.

As we neared the water's edge, my companion started and turned perfectly livid, as if labouring under some fearfully strong emotion. True to his self-command, however, he allowed no other outward sign to betray his feelings. In front of us walked a Turkish lady, closely veiled of course, and accompanied by a female negro slave. Following the Beloochee's gaze, I observed by the lady's dress and demeanour that she was of high rank, and in all probability the property of some great man, a Pasha at least. At that time a black attendant argued no inferiority on the part of the mistress as it does now. It is only since the peace of '56 that the negro woman has been at such a discount in Stamboul as to fill every corner of the streets with her lamentations, looking in vain for a purchaser, a master, and a home.

The cause of this sudden fall in the value of a strong, serviceable article, which had hitherto commanded a fair and remunerative price, is to be found as usual in the enterprise of speculators, and the luxurious tendencies of an unfeeling public. The far-seeing slave-dealers who provide the Turkish market with Circassian wares had no difficulty in foretelling that the Treaty of Paris would abandon to their fate those gallant mountaineers of the Cau-

casus who have so long and so manfully struggled for independence from the Russian yoke, and that soon they must bid an eternal farewell to their lucrative traffic in Circassian beauty, and their judicious supply of wives for the Pashas of Constantinople. Accordingly, ere the treaty came into operation, and the Government of the Czar was authorized to forbid the export of its new subjects, they proceeded to buy up, far and near, every eligible young lady of Circassian origin, and forward her as speedily as possible to the Emporium of Matrimony at Constantinople. Nor was this so hard a lot for these mountain-daisies as it may at first sight appear. They are taught to look upon the slave-market of the Turkish capital as the arena in which they are to contend for the prizes of life — namely, comfortable quarters, luxurious baths, a house full of slaves, and a rich master. To be deprived of her season at Stamboul is a bitter disappointment to a Circassian belle. We in England cannot understand this. Our fair Anglo-Saxons broil in London through the dog-days simply and entirely for the exquisite delights of its amusements and its society. Who ever heard of an English girl going to a ball with any ulterior view but that of dancing? Who ever detected her paying her modest court to an elderly Pasha (of the Upper House) for the sake of having jewels and amber, and gilded arabas and slaves, at her disposal? Who ever knew a blooming rose of June that would have made the treasure of his life to Lazarus, and changed his gloomy dwelling to a bower of Paradise transplanted by her own desire to the hothouses of

Dives, there to queen it for a day among all his plants and exotics, and then pine neglected and withering away? No, no, we know nothing of such doings, but the trade flourishes handsomely in the East, and consequently the spring and summer of '56 saw Constantinople literally *smothered* in beauty. I use the word advisedly, for an Oriental enslaver, in the language of Burns, is "a lass who has acres of charms," and a Pasha purchases his wife as he does his mutton, by the pound. Now, demand and supply, like action and reaction, are "equal and contrary," nor is woman more than any other marketable commodity exempt from the immutable law; so when this invasion of beauty came pouring into Constantinople, the value even of a Circassian decreased steadily in an alarming ratio, till a damsel that, in the golden days of gallantry, would have fetched a hundred and fifty pounds sterling, was now to be bought "warranted" for five! Mark the sequel. Luxury crept in amongst the lower classes. The poor Turkish artisan, ambitioning a Circassian bride, sold his tools, his all — nay, his faithful black wives, to purchase the unheard-of blessing. The poor negro women were turned adrift into the streets. Who was to bid for them? During the worst period of the panic, black women were selling in Constantinople at a shilling a dozen!

The Beloochee griped my arm hard. "It is Zuleika!" he whispered between his set teeth. "She has not seen me — she does not know I am here. Perhaps she has forgotten me!"

"Let us follow her," said I, for in truth I sym-

pathized with poor Ali, and my English blood boiled at the manner in which he had been deprived of his bride.

The Beloochee loosened his dagger in its sheath, and drew the folds of his shawl tighter round his waist. "Effendi," said he, "you are a true comrade — Bismillah! the end is yet to come."

The lady and her attendant walked provokingly slow, looking at every object of curiosity on their way, and making it exceedingly difficult for us to adapt our pace to theirs without exciting observation in the passers-by. At length they reached the water-side, and summoning a caïque, pushed out into the Bosphorus. We were speedily embarked in another and following in their wake, our caïgee, or boatman, at once penetrating our intentions, and entering into the spirit of the thing with all the fondness for mischief and intrigue so characteristic of his class. As we glided along over the rippling waters we had ample time to dispose our plans, the object of which was to give the Beloochee an opportunity of communicating with his lost love, to learn, and if possible, to rescue her from her fate. "Keep close to that caïque," said I, to our sympathizing waterman, "and when we are secure from observation go up alongside." The rascal showed all his white teeth, as he grinned intelligence and approval.

So we glided down the beautiful Bosphorus, past marble palaces and glittering kiosks, till we came under the very walls of a building, more magnificent than any we had yet passed, with a wide frontage towards the water, supported on shafts as of smoothest

alabaster, the closed lattices of which, with its air of carefully guarded seclusion, denoted the harem of some great dignitary of the empire, who was in the habit of retiring hither to solace himself after the labours of government and the cares of state. Through a gate of iron trellis-work, beautifully designed and wrought, we caught a glimpse of a lovely garden, rich in gorgeous hues, and sparkling with fountains murmuring soothingly on the ear, whilst from the lofty doors, securely clamped and barred, wide steps of marble reached down to the water's edge, lipped and polished by the lazy ripple of the waves.

Here we brought our bark alongside the object of our chase, but we had reckoned without our host in counting on the imperturbability of a lady's nerves, for no sooner had the Beloochee turned his face towards Zuleika, and whispered a few short syllables straight from his heart, than with a loud shriek she tossed her hands wildly above her head, and fainted dead away in the bottom of the caïque.

At that instant the boat's nose touched the lower step of the palace, and the negro woman, almost as helpless as her mistress, began screaming loudly for assistance, whilst a guard of blacks opening the huge double doors came swarming down to the water's edge, scowling ominously at the Beloochee and myself, who with our mischievous boatman had now shoved off and remained at some distance from the shore.

There was but one thing to be done, and that quickly. "*Hakim!*" I shouted to the blacks, who

were bearing the lifeless form of the girl up the palace-steps; "I am a doctor, do you want my assistance?" and at the same time, I handed my pencil-case and the back of a letter to my comrade. Alas! he could not write, but in a hurried whisper entreated me, if possible, to communicate with Zuleika, and bear her the message which he confided to me from his old and faithful love.

By dint of threats and a kick or two, I prevailed on my friend the caïgee, who began to think the fun was getting too hot for him, to pull ashore; and boldly mounting the steps, I informed the chief of the harem-guard authoritatively that I was a physician, and that if the Khanum's (lady's) life was to be saved, not a moment must be lost. She was evidently a favourite wife of her lord, for her fainting fit seemed to have caused much commotion in the household, and during his absence the major-domo of the harem took upon himself, not without many misgivings and much hesitation, to admit me, a *giaour* and a *man*, within the sacred and forbidden precincts.

The Turks have a superstitious reverence for the science of medicine, which they believe, and not without reason, to be practised by the Franks more successfully than by themselves. To my adoption of the character of a *Hakim* I owed my present immunity and my entrance into that sanctum of a Turk's house, which it is considered indecorous even to *mention* in conversation with its master.

I do not lay claim to more courage than my neighbours, and I confess it was with a beating

heart that I followed the helpless form of Zuleika borne by her swarthy attendants up the palace steps, through the massive doors which swung and closed behind me, as if to shut out all chance of escape, to find myself at the top of a handsome staircase, on the very threshold of the women's apartment. What confusion my entrance created! Shrieks and jeers, and stifled laughter resounded on all sides, whilst black eyes flashed inquiring glances at the Frankish doctor; veiled, indeed, but scarcely dimmed by the transparent folds of the yashmak, and loosely clad forms in all the colours of the rainbow, flitted hither and thither, with more demonstration of activity than the occasion seemed to warrant.

I had heard much of the discipline of these caged birds, and pictured to myself, with sympathizing pity, their isolated condition, cut off from friends and relatives, weighed down by all the fetters of wedlock, but denied the consolations of domestic happiness, and had imagined that the Turkish woman was probably the most unhappy of all the daughters of Eve. What a deal of commiseration thrown away! Perhaps no woman in the world is more completely her own mistress in her own way than is the wife of a Turkish dignitary. Habit reconciles her to the veil, which indeed is of the thinnest material, and is almost her only restriction. She can walk abroad for business or pleasure, attended by only one female slave, and with such a convoy comes and goes unquestioned. It is only of very late years that an English lady could walk through the streets of London without at least as efficient a

guard. The Oriental beauty, too, has her own hours and her own apartments. Even her lord himself, he whom we picture as a turbaned Blue-beard, despotic in his own household, the terror of his wives and servants, preserves a chivalrous etiquette towards the lady that adorns his harem. He does not venture to cross the threshold of her apartment should he find her slippers placed outside. It is a signal that he is not wanted, and nothing would induce him to be guilty of such an act of rudeness as to go in. He comes at stated times, and his visits are always preceded by due notice. He lavishes handsome presents on his departure, and when he is unable to sun himself in the sight of her beauty, in consequence of his other engagements, and the rest of the suns in whose rays it is his duty to bask, he provides her with caïques and arabas to take her abroad, and furnishes her with plenty of pin-money to spend in the delightful occupation of shopping.

The chief of the negro-guard looked wistfully at me as I accompanied him, rolling the whites of his eyes in evident uncertainty and perturbation. As, however, Zuleika was still senseless, it seemed absolutely necessary that I should prescribe for her before my departure, and, accordingly, he motioned me to follow the stout blacks who were carrying her into the very inner recesses of the harem.

As I passed through those luxuriously-furnished apartments, I could not refrain from casting many a curious glance around at the diverse implements and accessories of the Turkish *toilette*, the many devices practised here, as in all lands, by the ladies, to

"keep them beautiful or leave them neat." Costly shawls, silks from India, muslins like the web of a gossamer, and brocades stiff and gorgeous as cloth of gold, were scattered about in unlimited profusion, mixed with amber beads, massive gold chains, necklaces, bracelets, and anklets, French watches set to Turkish time, precious stones of every value and hue, sandal-wood fans, and other rare knickknacks, mixed up with the most insignificant articles one can imagine, such as cardracks, envelope-cases of papier maché, small brushes with oval mirrors at the back, and all sorts of trifles sent out from Paris and bought in Pera, to amuse those grown-up children. The rooms were lofty and spacious, but the casements, even those that overlooked the gardens, jealously closed, and the lattices almost impervious even to the cool northern breeze. Bath-rooms opened from either side of the apartments, and every appliance for that Turkish luxury was of the most complete kind. At length we reached the room appropriated to Zuleika's especial use, and as her bearers laid her on the divan, I observed that in this more than in any other apartment of the palace, luxury reigned supreme. I argued Zuleika must be, at least for the present, the reigning favourite and queen of the Seraglio.

CHAPTER VI.

My Patient.

"WITH the blessing of Allah! rub the palms of her hands with saffron!"

"Allah-Allah! Allah-Allah! — tickle the soles of her feet with feathers!"

"It is destiny! In the name of the Prophet, pour cold water down her back!" "Room for the Frankish Hakim!" "May dogs defile the grave of the Giaour!"

Such were the exclamations that followed me into the apartment of Zuleika; for the Moslem daughters of Eve are not exempt from the curiosity attributed by tradition to the common mother; and have, moreover, superinduced on that pardonable failing certain prejudices of their own against the Christian unbeliever, whom, even when availing themselves of his assistance, they do not scruple to curse fluently, spitting the while between their teeth with considerable energy and effect.

Pending the application of their customary remedies, which in my ignorance of fainting-fits I judged to be the professional course of treatment, the ladies of the harem crowded and chatted at the door, peering over each other's shoulders, advancing a step into the apartment, retiring in confusion with a giggle and a scream, flirting atrociously with their

negro guards — men of ebony without and ice within, as indeed they had need be — and otherwise to the best of their abilities increasing the general confusion.

One alone came boldly forward to my assistance; venerable she was, but a dame whom age, though it had deprived her of the charms, had not robbed of the enchanting timidity of youth.

In her efforts to assist the sufferer she had cast her veil aside, but true to Oriental modesty she scrupulously covered her mouth* (and a very black set of teeth) with her hand even while she addressed me. Authoritative in her manner, and evidently accustomed to despotic sway in this part of the establishment, I confess I sincerely pitied the Pasha to whom this energetic lady must for several years have belonged. She came close up to me, tore the yashmak from Zuleika's face, and exclaimed in tones which admitted of no dispute —

“Bring otto of roses to anoint our dove; strip her at once from head to foot; and kick the Giaour downstairs!”

It was now time to assume a certain amount of dignified authority. I waved away the uncompromising old lady with the air of a magician dismissing his familiar; I ordered the lattice to be immediately thrown open — fortunately it looked towards

* A curious custom peculiar to the sex all over the East. The veil, indeed, seems only adopted as a screen for the mouth, since the eyes are suffered to flash undimmed by its transparent folds. Should a Turkish woman be surprised by chance without her yashmak, she immediately claps her hand to her lips, and so remains till the male stranger has passed by.

the East, which was considered much to enhance the virtue of the breeze that stole through its aperture — and taking advantage of the returning animation which dawned on Zuleika's countenance, I repeated an incantation in English — if I remember right it was the negro melody of "*Oh, Susannah!*" accompanying the monotonous tones with appropriate gestures, until my patient opened her languishing black eyes, glanced heavily around her, and sitting upright on her couch announced herself completely recovered.

My popularity was now at the flood. Had I administered the simple remedies which I have since been informed are beneficial in such cases, I should, however successful, have been looked upon merely in the light of a common practitioner; but that the lady should recover to the tones of a popular air, accompanied by a deportment of ludicrous solemnity, constituted a success which stamped me at once as a proficient in the Black Art, and won for me unqualified obedience and respect, not wholly devoid of fear.

To take advantage of the happy moment, I pulled my watch from my pocket, and placing my finger on the patient's wrist, bid the imperious dame aforesaid remark how the pulsations corresponded with the ticks of that instrument. This, too, was a great discovery, and the watch was handed round for examination to all the curious inmates of the harem in turn.

I then ordered the room to be cleared, and insisted that I should be left alone with my patient

until the minute-hand of my watch had reached the favourable hour.

This I knew would give me five minutes' conversation with Zuleika, and as I expected the Pasha home at every instant, I could not afford more than this short space of time to give my friend the Beloochee's message and plead his cause. The room was speedily cleared, not, however, without much laughing, screaming, and scuffling in the passage. As soon as I was alone with Zuleika, I whispered gently in her ear not to be afraid, but to trust me, as I came from him she loved best in the world.

The girl started, and began to tremble violently; she was so pale that I dreaded another fainting fit, and the consequent destruction of my reputation as a doctor. Though an Arab, she was a *woman*; and at this crisis of her destiny was of course paralysed by fear and totally incapable of acting for herself. Had her emotion mastered her once more, the golden opportunity would have been lost; there was nothing for it but to work upon her feelings, and I proceeded in a tone of indifference —

"You have forgotten him. He bids me say that 'the rose has been transplanted into a garden of purer air and cooler streams; he has seen with his own eyes that she is blooming and fragrant, and he is satisfied. He rejoices in your happiness, and bids you farewell!'"

She burst into a flood of tears; her woman's heart was touched, as I hoped it would be, by the sentiment I had put into her lover's mouth, and the relief thus afforded brought her composure and self-

command. She came of a race, too, that never lacked courage or fortitude, and the wild desert-blood soon mantled once more in her rich soft cheek — the tameless spirit of the Bedouin soon flashed again from her large dark eyes.

“Effendi!” she replied, in a firm though mournful voice, “my father’s daughter can never forget. Bid him think no more of the rose he cherished so fondly. She has been plucked from the stem, and now she is drooping and withering away.”

“But Allah suffers not the flowers to perish,” I proceeded in Oriental metaphor, while she clasped her slender hands and seemed to look through me with her glittering eyes. “He sends the dews from heaven to refresh them at night. A wild bird will sing to the rose before dawn, and she will open her petals and bloom once more fresh and glistening in the morning sun. Zuleika, have you completely forgotten Ali Mesrour?”

At the sound of his name a soft saddened expression stole over her eager face, large drops gathered in her drooping eyelashes, and it was with a thrilling voice that she replied — “Never! never! once more to see him, only once more to hear his voice, and so to die! so to die!” she repeated, looking dreamily as if into the hopeless future.

“It is destiny,” was my answer. “There is but one Allah! An hour before dawn there will be a caïque at the garden-gate. Zuleika must contrive the rest. The risk is great, but ‘the diver cannot fetch pearls without wetting his hair.’ Will Zuleika promise?”

"I promise!" was all she had time to reply, for at this instant no slight commotion was heard in the household, and looking from the casement I perceived an eight-oared caïque brought alongside of the palace-steps, from which a pipe-bearer springing rapidly ashore, followed by a more sedate personage, evidently a *kiâtib* or secretary, heralded the great man of the party, who, emerging from the shade of a white silk umbrella, hitherto held carefully over him by a third official, now laboured majestically up the marble steps, pausing occasionally to draw a long breath, and looking around him the while with an air of corpulent satisfaction that no one but a Turk could imitate with the slightest prospect of success.

It was indeed the Pasha himself — the fortunate possessor of the magnificent dwelling, the owner of all these negro slaves, this gorgeous retinue, these beautiful women — and more still, the lord and master of poor Zuleika. I thought it better to meet him on the threshold than to risk his astonishment and displeasure by awaiting his entrance into the harem; accordingly I hurried down to the court-yard of his palace, and presented myself before him with a mixture of Eastern courtesy and European self-respect, such as never fails to impress a Turk with the feeling that in presence of a Frank he is himself but of an inferior order of mankind.

"*Salaam*, Effendi!" was the observation of the proprietor, as polite and unmoved as if he had expected me all day. "You are welcome! My house with all it contains is at your disposal!" He motioned

me courteously into a large handsome apartment on the ground-floor of the palace, bid me be seated, and clapping his palms together, called for pipes and coffee; then placing himself comfortably on the divan, he crossed his hands over his stomach, and repeated, "You are welcome!" after which he sat perfectly silent, nodding his head from side to side, and peering curiously at me out of his small twinkling grey eyes.

He was an enormously fat man, buttoned up of course into the usual single-breasted frock-coat, on the outside of which glittered the diamond order of the Medjidjie. His huge shapeless legs were encased in European trousers of the widest dimensions, and terminated in varnished Wellington boots, from which he had just cast off a pair of India-rubber goloshes. It was the modern Turkish costume, affected by the Sultan himself, and a dress so ill-adapted for the dog-days at Constantinople can hardly be imagined; yet every official, every dignitary, every military man, is now clad in these untoward habiliments, for which they have discarded the picturesque draperies of their ancestors; so that the fine old Turk, "shawled to the eyes, and bearded to the nose," is only to be seen in Stamboul amongst the learned professions and the inferior orders of tradesmen and mechanics. A red fez was the single characteristic article of clothing worn by the Pasha; and a more villainous expression of countenance than that which it overshadowed, it has seldom been my lot to confront. We stared at each other without speaking. It would have been ill-bred on the part of my host to ask me

what I wanted, and I should have been guilty of an equal solecism in entering on my business until I had partaken of the customary refreshment.

Coffee was ere long brought in by negro slaves armed to the teeth, and of savage scowling aspect. It was served in delicate fillagree cups, set with priceless diamonds. Long chibouques were then filled and lighted. As I pressed the pure amber to my lips, and inhaled the fragrant aroma of the narcotic weed, I resolved to brazen it out manfully; but never, never again to find myself in such another scrape, no, not for all the warriors in Beloochistan, nor all the "Zuleikas" that ever eloped with them from the desert.

I thought I would say nothing of my visit to the harem. I judged, and rightly, that neither the ladies themselves, nor the negro-guard, whose duty it was to watch over those caged birds, would be over-anxious to communicate the breach of discipline which had just been enacted, and that, although the secret was sure to ooze out in the course of a day or two, it was needless to anticipate the turmoil and disturbance which would attend its discovery.

But what excuse to make for my ill-timed visit? How to account for my intrusion on the leisure of so great a man as Papoosh Pasha, one of the half-dozen highest dignitaries of the Empire, the friend and counsellor of the Sultan himself, even then fresh from the sacred precincts of the Seraglio Palace, where he had been helping sundry other ponderous Pashas to mismanage the affairs of his country, and to throw dust in the eyes of the enervated voluptuary

who held the reins of power in a sadly palsied grasp. I too must take a leaf out of the book of Asiatic duplicity. I had seen a ship full of wounded dropping her anchor as I came along; there must have been another attack on the stronghold at Sebastopol — I was pretty safe in surmising, with no satisfactory result. I would pretend then that I had been sent to inform his Excellency of the particulars, and accordingly I puffed forth a volume of pure white smoke towards the ceiling, and advanced under cover of the discharge.

“His Highness has sent me hither in haste to inform your Excellency of the great news from the front. Am I too late to be the fortunate bearer, or has your Excellency already heard the particulars from the Elshie?”*

He darted a keen, suspicious glance at me, and replied gravely enough, “The war goes on prosperously in the front. Whe shall yet sweep ‘the Muscov’ from the face of the earth!”

“I am desired to inform your Excellency,” I resumed, determined to persevere at all hazards, “that the Allies have again attacked the place. The Moscov came out in great numbers to repel the assault; the French have suffered severely; the Turkish troops covered the retreat with great gallantry and steadiness; fifteen hundred Russians remained dead upon the field; many more are disabled; Sebastopol must surrender within ten days.”

“Mashallah!” replied the Pasha, laying his pipe

* The ambassador.

down by his side; but for the life of me I could not make out whether or not he believed a word I had been telling him.

"Have I fulfilled my duty to your Excellency?" I continued, becoming every moment more and more anxious to make my escape. "I am at your Excellency's disposal; "I am the humblest of your slaves. Have I your permission to depart?"

He looked uneasily around, but there seemed no apparent excuse for delay. It was evident to me that he wished to communicate with his retainers, but that his politeness forbade him to do so in my presence, and a Turk never allows any emergency to make him forget the exigencies of etiquette. He bade me farewell with much cordiality, ordered a horse to be got ready to carry me home, and dismissed me with many expressions of affection, but with the same fierce twinkle in that cunning leaden eye that had already more than once warned me to beware.

Many and devoted were the Pasha's retainers; hundreds slept on his mats, and followed at his heels, but I question whether I, the poor nameless Interpreter, could not command a greater amount of affection, courage, and fidelity, in the breast of my one trusty, four-footed slave and companion, than existed in the whole retinue, black and white, of the Oriental dignitary.

Bold had followed me through my wanderings, faced with me many of the dangers of warfare, and shared in all its privations. The old dog was getting very time-worn now, quite grizzled about the

muzzle, and ludicrously solemn, both in countenance and demeanour. To the world in general his temper was anything but conciliatory, and it required little provocation to make him set his mark on man or beast that affronted him; but with me he was always the same, obedient, devoted, and affectionate. He accompanied me everywhere, and would wait for hours in the courtyards of the Seraskerât or the Embassy, till his master emerged from the long-watched portal, when he would rise, give himself a lazy shake, and stalk on gravely by my side, occasionally thrusting his wet cold nose into my hand, and scowling at all strangers, even of his own species, with a very ominous "*noli me tangere*" expression, that forbade the slightest approach to familiarity.

Now the dog is an unclean animal to the Musulman, and although his life is spared, as being the authorized scavenger of the streets, the true disciple of the Prophet scrupulously shuns all contact with the brute that the Christian loves to train as a servant and cherish as a friend. There is a curious old Arabic legend, which, although not to be found in the Koran, is recognised by the faithful as a trustworthy tradition, and to believe in which is esteemed an essential point of doctrine by the devout, that accounts for this unkindly superstition. Freely translated, it runs much in the following fashion:—

"When Allah had created the land and the sea, the mountains, the forests, the flowers, and the precious stones, he looked, and behold there was beauty and silence all over the earth.

"Then Allah created the birds and the beasts and

the fishes; all things that swim, and creep, and fly, and run, and every living thing rejoiced in the sunshine.

“So Allah rested from his work in the Garden of Eden, by the Four Rivers, and looked around him, and behold the whole earth was astir in the forepart of the day.

“Then the breeze blew, and the waters laughed and rippled, and the birds sang, and the blossoms fell.

“So the angels smiled, and said, Praise be to Allah. It is very good — Allah! Bismillah!

“Then Allah saw that there were none of the inhabitants of earth that could smile as the angels smiled, or walk erect and praise him with the face to heaven.

“For the steed was grazing downward, and the lion lay couched in his lair, and the eagle, though she turned her eye to the sun, had neither praise nor smile.

“Then Allah took clay, and moistened it, and fashioned it till the sun went down.

“And Allah rested from his work, and left it in the Garden of Eden, by the Great Tree, where the Four Rivers spring.

“Now Gabriel walked in the garden, and he stopped where the work of Allah lay plastic on the sward, and the star shone bright on his forehead, for he praised Allah in his heart.

“And Shaitán came to walk in the garden, to cool his brow, and he stopped over against Gabriel and mocked.

"And Shaitán said, 'What is this, that I may know it, and name it, and claim my share in it for my own?'

"And Gabriel answered, 'Praise be to Allah; who has made all things well. This is Allah's work, and it shall be the perfection of all. Bismillah!'

"Then Shaitán laughed once more, and he turned the image over with his foot, so that it stood on all fours, with its face to the dust, and spat upon it, and said, 'It is empty! On my eyes be it!'

"And in the morning there was silence in Eden, for the work of Allah had been defiled.

"And Allah said, 'This is the doing of Shaitán. Behold I will make of it yet another brute, and it shall be called the Dog, and be accursed.

"And I will take other clay, and fashion another image that shall smile as the angels smile, and walk erect with its face to heaven, and I will call it Man.'

"And Shaitán cowered behind the Great Tree and listened to the voice of Allah, and, though he trembled, he smiled.

"For Shaitán knew that he would have his share in the Man as in the beast."

Poor Bold, unconscious of his excommunication, hurried up to me in the courtyard of the Pasha's palace, where a fine horse, richly caparisoned, was being brought alongside the mounting-block for my use. In doing so the dog's tail, waving to greet his master, touched the hand of a tall forbidding-looking negro that stood by, grinning from ear to ear, as is

the custom of his countrymen. The black swore a great oath, and kicked my dog savagely in the jaws. As Bold pinned him by the leg, I caught him such a buffet under the ear as knocked him fairly into the dust; from which abject position he embraced my feet and called me "his father." With some little difficulty I rated Bold off his prostrate foe, and, mounting my horse, or rather the Pasha's, rode quietly to my hotel, where I dismissed the steed, and the groom who had accompanied him on foot, with a "*baksheesh*" and thought nothing more of the transaction. "A word and a blow" is as common a proceeding in Constantinople as at Donnybrook fair, though it leads to far different results; inasmuch as in the former abode of despotic authority and slavish submission it is very generally the only argument that is capable of enforcing proper subordination and respect.

It is seldom that a man loses his temper, even under the greatest provocation, without having cause, sooner or later, to regret his want of self-command. There are few of our fellow-creatures so unimportant that it is not worth while to conciliate them, none that may not some time have it in their power to inflict on us an injury; besides, an angry man is only less contemptible than a frightened one. And, like everything else that is unchristianlike, it is surely ungentlemanlike to put oneself in a passion. There was not much in knocking down a negro slave for his brutality towards my favourite, yet, ere long, I had cause bitterly to rue that I had not let him alone.

CHAPTER VII.

"Messirie's."

A NARROW street, paved with the roughest and sharpest of flints, debouching into three other streets even less commodious than itself; a Turkish sentry dozing torpid at his post — half-a-dozen *hamauls** clad in rough frieze jackets, and wide pantaloons of the same material, gathered in at the knee, scratching their brown herculean legs, and examining their broad flat feet, as they recline against a dirty dead wall, and interchange their jests with a degree of humour foreign to our English ideas of Turkish gravity — a rascally-looking dragoman in a black frock-coat and a fez, rolling a cigarette, prepared to cheat, rob, swindle, or lie, at the shortest notice, a slave to every sensual vice except drunkenness, and speaking all the languages on earth in bad Italian — a brace of English jack-tars, a-fire with raki, trolling out "Cheer, boys, cheer," and a stray Zouave, equally exhilarated, joining in chorus; a T. G., or travelling gent, with nascent beard, and towel wound turban-wise around his straw-hat, wishing himself in Pall Mall, and indignant at the natives, who call him "*Johnny*."

* Porters.

The REAL thing from the Crimea, in a curiously worn-out shell jacket, patched and darned, stained and tarnished, with a bronzed face, a bushy beard of two years' growth, and a slight limp that for the rest of his life will bid him "remember the fifth of November," and the turning of the tide upon the declivity of Inkermann.

Two or three English merchants, like crows, to be seen all over the world, and everywhere in the same dress, with white shirts, and honest broad-cloth coats, that remind one of home; a Queen's messenger, with tweed shooting-jacket and official forage-cap, clean shaved and clear looking, after the bad passage and gale of wind he is sure at all seasons to encounter in the Mediterranean, a miracle to us *habitués* of the place, being actually as fresh from London as yonder copy of *The Times* newspaper, which came with him by the same mail, the only unfeathered biped in creation that thoroughly carries out the idea of "Here to-day, gone to-morrow." Such are the concomitants of the scene upon which I enter at the door of Messirie's hotel, that well-known *rendezvous* in Pera where congregate all that have any connexion with the mother country; a place where every rumour is to be heard with its latest embellishments, and where, for the sum of seventeen francs a day, I can command a moderate breakfast, a dinner, into the components of which it is better not to inquire, and a murky bedroom, where the fierce mosquito shall drain my life-blood all the weary night.

"Is Major Manners in the hotel?" I inquire, as I throw myself off the Pasha's horse, and, glancing

at a face in the street very like that of the man I knocked down some three-quarters of an hour ago, reflect what a family resemblance reigns amongst the wretched sons of Ham. Bold is in his worst of humours, and growls ominously. "Is Major Manners here?" I repeat, and three Greek servants, with an abortive attempt to pronounce the Frankish name, shrug their shoulders and open their hands to express the hopeless imbecility in which they rejoice. I perceive a stout man in a white hat, picking his teeth unconcernedly in the passage, and, recognising him for the master, I apply at once for the information I require. He looks contemptuously at me in reply, and turning his broad back upon me, walks off without deigning to take any further notice of a customer; but I have been here before, and I know there is balm in Gilead. I know that in a certain little room on the left I shall find the hostess, and that she, the mainstay and prop of the establishment, will spare no pains to assist a countryman. Kindly Madame Messirie! always ready to aid one in a difficulty, always busy, always good-humoured, always so thoroughly English, it was quite refreshing to hear the tones of your homely voice, and fancy oneself in the "White Lion," or the "Blue Bear," or some other pleasant hostelry with post-horses and a bar, and an ostler's bell, far away in merry England.

"Vere Egerton! can that be you?" said a voice that I thought I recognised, as I entered the *sanctum* in which the hostess reigned supreme. "Little Egerton, as I'm alive, grewed out of knowledge, and

doubtless by this time a Pasha with three tails, and a true Believer. Tell me all about the process of conversion and the tenets of your faith."

It was indeed Ropsley, — Ropsley the Guardsman — Ropsley the dandy, but how altered! The attenuated *roué* of former days had grown large and muscular, his face was brown and healthy, his forehead frank and open, the clear grey eye was brighter and quicker than it used to be; it had caught the ready, eager glance of those who look death habitually in the face, but had lost much of the cruel, calculating, leaden expression I remembered so well. Despite his worn-out uniform, the rents in which showed here and there a red flannel shirt, — despite his close-cropped hair and flowing beard, — I could not but confess to myself, as I grasped his hand, that Ropsley looked ten years younger and ten times handsomer than when I saw him last.

Yes, I met him cordially, and as an old friend. 'Tis true he had been my greatest enemy, 'tis true he had inflicted on me a wound, the scar of which I felt I should carry to my grave; but months had passed away since then; months, which, crowding events upon events, had seemed like years; months of danger, labour, hardship, and tribulation. Of what avail is suffering if it does not soften and purify the heart? Why are those that mourn blessed, if it is not that they learn the bitter lesson grief alone can teach? My task had been a hard one — how hard none knew save the poor humbled scholar who conned it day by day, and blistered the page with his tears; but I had conquered it at last,

and so I freely forgave Ropsley, and clasped him by the hand.

"You dine here, of course," he said, in his old half humorous, half-sarcastic voice. "Madame Messirie, princess of Pera, and queen of my soul, order a place to be set for my friend the Pasha, and lots of champagne to be put in ice. I have only just come down from the front; I have scarcely had a decent dinner, or seen a silver fork, for a year and a-half. It's an endless business, this, Egerton; hammer, hammer, hammer, yet nothing comes of it, and the old place looks whiter and more inviting than ever, but we *can't get in!*"

"And the Mamelon?" said I, eager for the last news from the spot to which millions of hearts were reaching, all athirst for hope.

"Got it at last," was his reply, "at least, our neighbours have; I hope they'll keep it. We made a sad mess last week, Egerton; lost no end of men, and half our best officers. Whew! I say nothing, only mark my words, if ever — but there's the bell! Never mind the siege now. War's a mistake, but dinner (if you can get it) never deceives you." And so saying, the *ci-devant* dandy patted me on the back, and pushed me before him into the well-lighted and now crowded *salon*.

In that strange country, so thoroughly Asiatic, which we call Turkey in Europe, there were so few links to connect us with the life of civilization which seemed to have passed from us like a dream, that it was no wonder we clung to Messirie's hotel and thronged its *table d'hôte* with a constancy and devo-

tion less to be attributed to its own intrinsic merits than to the associations and reminiscences it called forth. Here were to be met all the gallant fellows who were going to, or coming from, the front. Heroes, whose names were destined to gild the page of history, might here be seen drinking bad tea, and complaining of the butter like ordinary mortals; but always in the highest spirits, as men seem invariably to be during the short lulls of a campaign. When you are likely to be shot next Monday-week, if you have small hopes, you have few anxieties. Here, too, you might sit opposite a diplomatist, who was supposed to know the innermost secrets of the Court at Vienna, and to be advised of what "the Austrians meant to do," whilst rubbing shoulders with you as he helped himself to fish, and confronting the man of ciphers, some heroic refugee, Pole, Croat, or Hungarian, whose name was in every journal in Europe, as it was inscribed on every military post in Austria or Russia, munched away with a capital appetite, and appeared only conspicuous for the extreme modesty and gentleness of his demeanour. Contractors of every nation jabbered in every language; nor was the supple Armenian, grafting the bold spirit of European speculation on his own Oriental duplicity, wanting to grasp his share of the plunder, which John Bull was so magnanimously offering as a premium to every description of fraud. Even the softer sex was not without its representatives. Two or three high-born English ladies, whose loving hearts had brought them hovering as near the seat of war as it was possible for a non-combatant to venture,

daily shed the light of their presence at the dinner-table, and were silently welcomed by many a bold spirit with a degree of chivalrous enthusiasm, of which, anxious and pre-occupied, they were but little aware. A man must have been living for months among *men*, must have felt his nature gradually *brutalizing* amidst the hardships, the sufferings, and the horrors of war, thoroughly to appreciate the softening influence of a woman's, and especially of a *countrywoman's*, society. Even to look on those waving white dresses, those gentle English faces, with their blooming cheeks and rich brown hair, was like a draught of water to a pilgrim in a weary land. It reminded us of home — of those we loved — and we went our way back into the desert a thought saddened perhaps, yet, for all that, kindlier and happier men.

"What a meeting!" exclaimed Manners, as, gorgeously arrayed in the splendours of a full-dress uniform, he took his seat by my side and shook hands with Ropsley, who returned his greeting with a cordial pressure and a look of quiet amusement in his eye that almost upset my gravity: "Everdon at Constantinople!" continued our former usher; "we only want De Rohan to make our gathering quite perfect!"

I winced, and for the first time in my life I saw Ropsley colour, but Manners was too much occupied to notice the emotion of either of us; for, during his many visits to Constantinople, the dashing officer of Bashi-Bazouks had made such numerous acquaintances, and become so necessary an ingredient in the society of Pera, that there seemed to be hardly an

individual at table, from the *attaché* of the Embassy down to the last-joined officer of the Commissariat, with whom he was not on terms of intimate familiarity. He had scarcely taken his seat and unfolded his dinner-napkin, ere the cross-fire of greetings and inquiries began. Manners, too, in the sunshine of all his popularity, had expanded into a wag; and although his witticisms were of a somewhat profound order, and not always very apparent to the superficial observer, they were generally well received; for a wag was a scarcer article in Constantinople than at the front.

So Manners proceeds with his dinner in great satisfaction and glory. After a couple of glasses of champagne he becomes overpoweringly brilliant. He is good enough too to take upon himself the onerous task of drilling the waiters, which he affects in bad French, and of abusing the deficiencies of the *cuisine*; a topic affording indeed ample scope for declamation. The waiters, especially a cunning old Greek, with a most villainous expression of countenance, betray an immense respect for Manners, tinged with an amused sort of amazement, and always help him first.

They bring him a dish of hare, large of limb and venerable in point of years. Our Bashi-Bazouk exclaims indignantly, "*Qu'est que ça?*"

"*C'est un lièvre, M'sieur,*" replies the waiter, with a forced smile, as of one who expects a jest he will not comprehend.

"*C'est un chat!*" gasps out Manners, glaring indignantly on the official.

"*Pardon, Monsieur,*" says the waiter, "*c'est trop gros pour un chat.*"

"*Chat,*" repeats Manners; "*Chat THOMAS!*" he adds, in a sepulchral voice, and with a frowning brow. The waiter shrinks abashed, the company laugh, and Manners's observation counts for a joke.

By this time conversation begins to buzz pretty freely around. Everybody drinks champagne, and tongues soon become loosened by the exhilarating fluid. Various topics are discussed, including a new beauty that has just arrived from Smyrna, of French extraction, and supposed to possess a fortune that sounds perfectly fabulous when calculated in *francs*. Manners listens attentively, for he has not totally abandoned the idea of combining the excitement of war with the pursuit of beauty — properly gilded, of course — and his maxim is that "None but the brave deserve the fair." Her praises, however, as also her name and address, are intercepted by the voluble comments of two stout gentlemen, his neighbours, on the utter incapacity of the Turkish Government, and the hopeless imbecility of "the people of this unhappy country, Sir, — a people without a notion of progress — destined to decay, Sir, from the face of the earth," as the stouter of the two, a British merchant, who is about investing in land here, remarks to his neighbour, a jovial Frenchman, who has already bought many a fertile acre in the neighbourhood of Constantinople, under the new Hatti-Sheriff;* and who replies, fixing his napkin securely in his buttonhole —

* An act empowering foreigners to hold land in Turkey.

“*Pourri, voyez-vous, mon cher. Crac! ça ne durera pas trois ans.*”

Opposite these worthies, an ensign in the Guards, and the Queen’s messenger, who is of a theatrical turn, are busy with the character, private as well as professional, of a certain star of the Opera, whom the latter has already criticised in the execution of his duty at Vienna, and an ardent desire to hear whom haunts the former enthusiast to such a degree, even in the very trenches, that he longs to attack and take Sebastopol single-handed, in order to get home again before she leaves London for the winter. The Turkish Ministry, changing as it does about once a-week; the policy of Austria; the Emperor Napoleon’s energy; the inefficiency of our own Commissariat; the ludicrous blunders of the War-Office, and the last retort courteous of Lord Stratford, all come in for their share of remark from prejudiced observers of every party and every opinion; but by degrees one voice rises louder than the rest, one individual attracts the notice of the whole dinner-table, and nowise abashed, but rather encouraged by the attention he commands, details volubly his own account of the capture of the Mamelon. He is a Frenchman, and a civilian, but somehow he has a red ribbon on his breast, and belongs to the Legion of Honour, so he “assisted” as he calls it, at the attack; and if he speaks truth, it must indeed have been an awful sight, and one in which his countrymen outdid themselves for valour, and that quality peculiar to the soldiers of France which they term *élan*, a word it is hopeless to think of translating. His

opinions are decided, if not satisfactory; his plan of storming the place an excellent one, if it could only be carried out.

"We have taken the Mamelon!" says he, "and what remains? Bah! The Malakhoff Tower is the key to the whole position. What would you have? Every simple soldier in the army knows it as well as you and I do. I tell you I 'assisted' at the capture of the *Mamelon Vert*. They received us with a fire, well sustained, of grape and small arms. Our ammunition failed us at the critical moment. I was in the ditch — *me!* — when the Zouaves came on with their yell — the 152nd of the line were in front of them. It must be carried with the bayonet! — *Pflan!* — our little red pantaloons were swarming up the work and over the parapet ere you could count ten — the tricolor was hoisted and the guns spiked in a twinkling — that is the only way to arrange these affairs. Now, see here — you have your Redan, you others — you have sapped up to it, as near as you can get. There must be a combined attack. You cannot hold it till we have silenced that little rogue of a Malakhoff. What to do? One of these "*four mornings*," as it was with the Mamelon so will it be with the Malakhoff! Give me a thick column, with the Zouaves in front and rear. These are not follies. I advance my column under cover — I pour in a volley! — I rush on with the bayonet! At the same moment the Redan falls. Your Guards and Scotchmen run in with their heads, a thousand cannon support you with their fire, the Allies hold the two most important defences,

the Garden Batteries are silenced. Chut! the place is ours! France and England are looking on. I do not say that this will be done; but this is how it ought to be done. If your generals are fools, what is that to me? I am not a general — I! — but a simple civilian! Waiter, a cigar! *Qui vivra, verra.*”

It is all *pipe-clay*, as the soldiers call it, now. The one engrossing topic silences every other. Alma, Inkermann, Lord Raglan’s flank march, and the earlier incidents of the siege, are related by the very men who took an active share in those deeds of glory. Two cavalry officers, both wounded on the fatal day, recapitulate once more the *pros* and *cons* of the immortal charge at Balaklava — a question that has been vexed and argued till the very actors themselves in that most brilliant of disasters scarcely know how they got in, and still less how they ever got *out*. Though struck down by the same shell, and within ten yards of one another, each takes a diametrically opposite view of the whole transaction from his comrade. They differ materially as to time, position, pace, and results; above all, as to the merits of the leader whose wreath of laurels faded as undeservedly as it bloomed prematurely.

“I was close behind him the whole way,” says the one; “I never saw a fellow so cool in my life, or so well ‘got up.’ He regulated every stride of that good chesnut horse like clock-work. When we came into fire, our line was dressed as if on parade. I know it by my own squadron. Will you tell me *that* man lost his head?”

"But where was he after we rode through the guns?" replied the other. "Answer me that! I grant you he took us in like a *brick*. But why didn't he bring us out? I never saw him after I was hit, and I *must* have seen him if he had rallied the first line, and been in his proper place to look out for his support. You were close to me, old fellow! I never knew before that bobtailed Irish horse of yours could gallop a mile and a half. You were sickish, my boy, for I saw your face; but your eyesight was unimpaired. Tell me, did *you see* him, and what was he doing?"

"I *did*, I'll swear!" answers the partisan, as fine a specimen of a young hussar as ever drew a sword. "And I'll tell you what he was doing. Mind, I don't say it because I *like* him, for I don't. Confound him! he put me under arrest once in Dublin, and I believe it was only because my boots weren't well blacked. But I saw him, with my own eyes, striking at three Cossacks, who were prodding him with their long lances, and if poor old Champion had not dropped under me just at that moment, I'd have gone in and had a shy to help him, if I lost my stick. No, no! he's game as a pebble, let them say what they will; and if it wasn't for those cursed papers, he'd have had all the credit he deserves. It was the quickest thing I ever rode to, my boy," adds the young one, rather flushed, and drinking off his champagne at a gulp in his excitement. "He had a *lead*, and he kept it right well, and I wont hear him run down."

"I don't care," replies his friend. "I maintain

it's a general's duty to know everything that's going on. I maintain he ought to have stood still and looked about him (to be sure, we couldn't see much in that smoke); ay! and, if necessary, waited there for the Heavies to come up. Now, I'll prove it to you in five minutes, if you'll only listen, you obstinate young beggar! Do you remember, just before we were both hit, your saying to me, 'What a go this is!' and my answering, 'Whatever we do, we must keep the men together, but half my horses are blown.' Do you remember that?"

"I *admit* nothing," answers the young man, laughing, "but I do remember that. It was just before we saw that strong body of Russian cavalry in rear of the guns, and I don't make out now why they weren't down upon us."

"Never mind that," pursues his opponent. "They behaved very steadily, and retired in good order; but you remember the circumstance. Well, he was then about six horses' lengths from us on our right."

"On our left," interposes the younger man — "on our left," for I remember poor Blades was knocked over between me and him."

"On our *right*," persists the other. "I am certain of it, my dear fellow, for I remarked at the time —"

"I am positive he was on our left! I remember it as well as if it was yesterday."

"I could take my oath he was on our right; for I recollect seeing his sabretasche swinging."

"Left!" says one, "Right!" says the other; and they never advance one step farther in the discussion,

which will be prolonged far into the night, to the consumption of much brandy and water, together with countless cigars, but with no further result.

If no two men see any one action of common life in the same light, how hopeless must it be to endeavour to get at the true statement of an event which takes place in the presence of a crowd of witnesses, all excited, all in peril of their lives, all enveloped in the dense smoke of a hundred guns, all maddening with the fierce, blood-stirring turmoil of such a deed of arms as the death-ride at Balaklava.

The instant dinner is finished, and coffee served, cigars are lit. It is a signal for the ladies to retire, and our handsome countrywomen sail out of the room, with that stately walk that none but an English lady ever succeeds in effecting. Many a glance follows them as they disappear; many a stout heart tightens under its scarlet covering, to think of the ideal at home — her gloves, her dress, her fragrant hair, her graceful gestures, and the gentle smile that may never gladden him again. Men are strange mixtures! the roughest and the coldest exteriors sometimes hide the most sensitive feelings; and when I hear a man professing audacious libertinism, and a supreme contempt for women, I always mistrust the bravado that is but a covering for his weakness, and set him down at once as a puppet, that a pair of white hands — if one only knew where to find them — can turn and twist and set aside at will.

Ropsley was much softer in his manner than he used to be. Had he, too, experienced the common fate? Was the dandy Guardsman no longer imper-

vious, *nulli penetrabilis astro?* Painful as was the subject, he talked much of the De Rohans. He had seen Constance married; he had heard repeatedly from Victor during the past year; and though he evidently knew my hopes and their disappointment, by the tenderness with which he handled the subject, he could not resist enlarging on the topic, and talking to me of that family, in which I could never cease to take the warmest interest. I winced, and yet I listened, for I longed to know and hear of her even now. I would have lain quietly on the rack only to be told of her welfare. It *was* painful too. Perhaps there is no moment at which the heart feels so empty — at which the hopelessness of a loss is so completely realized, as when we hear the idol of our lives talked of in a matter-of-course way, as being totally unconnected with, and independent of, ourselves.

I remarked that, of his own accord, Ropsley never mentioned Valérie. To an inquiry of mine as to the welfare of my kind and handsome nurse, he gave, I thought, rather an abrupt reply; and, turning suddenly round to Manners, asked him if "there was nothing to be done in the evening in this stupid place?" To which our gallant Bashi-Bazouk, who considered himself responsible for our amusement, answered delightedly, "No opera *yet*, Ropsley, though we shall have one in six weeks; no evening parties either, except a few amongst the French inhabitants — delightful people, you know, and *very* select. I am invited to-night to a little music, not far from here. I could take you both, if you like, with *me*."

As friends of mine you would be most welcome. You speak French, Ropsley, if I remember right?"

"A little," replied the latter, much amused, "but not with *your accent*;" which, indeed, was true enough; for he had lived a good deal at Paris, and knew Chantilly as well as Newmarket. "Am I well enough dressed, though, for your fastidious friends?" he added, glancing, not without a gleam of inward satisfaction, from his own war-worn, threadbare uniform, to Manners's brilliant and somewhat startling costume.

"Couldn't be better!" replied the latter; "looks workmanlike, and all that. This time next year I only hope mine will be half as good. Meanwhile, come along, you and Egerton; never mind your cigars, they all smoke here."

"What! ladies and all, at these *select* parties?" laughed Ropsley. "I thought we were going amongst a lot of duchesses; but I hope they don't drink as well?"

"Custom of the country, my dear sir," replied Manners, gravely — "only cigarettes, of course. If a young lady offers to roll you one, don't refuse it. These little things are matters of etiquette, and it is as well to know beforehand." So, drilling us on the proper behaviour to be observed at a Pera party, our cicerone swaggered out into the night air, clanking his spurs, and rattling his sabre, with a degree of jingling vigour which seemed to afford him unlimited satisfaction. It was rather good to see Ropsley of the Guards — the man who had the *entrée* to all the best houses in London, the arbiter

of White's, the quoted of diners-out, the favourite of fine ladies — listening with an air of the greatest attention to our former usher's lectures on the proper deportment to be assumed in the company to which he was taking us, and thanking him with the utmost gravity for his judicious hints and kind introduction to the *élite* of Pera society.

"Go home, Bold, go home." The old dog *would* accompany me out of the hotel, *would* persist in following close at my heel along the narrow street. Not a soul but our three selves seemed to be wandering about this beautiful starlight night. The Turkish sentry was sound asleep on his post; a dark figure, probably some houseless *hamaul*, crouched near the sentry-box. Savage Bold wanted to fly at it as he passed.

"How cantankerous the old dog grows," remarked Ropsley, as Bold stalked behind us, ears erect, and bristling all over with defiance. Ere we were fifty yards from the hotel he stopped short and barked loudly; a footstep was rapidly approaching up the street. Murders and robberies were at this time so frequent in Constantinople, that every passenger was an object of mistrust in the dark. We, however, were three strong men, all armed, and had nothing to fear. Bold, too, seemed to recognise the step. In another moment the Beloochee overtakes us, and with even a more imperturbable air than usual salutes me gravely, and whispers a few words in my ear. On my reply, he places my hand against his forehead, and says, "The brothers of the sword are brothers indeed. Effendi, you know Ali Mesrour,

the son of Abdul. From henceforth my life is at the disposal of my Frankish brother."

A hurried consultation between the three Englishmen succeeds. Manners makes a great virtue of sacrificing sundry waltzers on which he seems to have set his heart, and is pathetic about the disappointment his absence will too surely inflict on Josephine, and Philippine, and Seraphine, but is amazingly keen and full of spirits notwithstanding. Ropsley, no longer the unimpressionable, apathetic dandy, whom nothing can excite or amuse, enters with zest into our project, and betrays a depth of feeling — nay, a touch of romance — of which I had believed him incapable. Bold is ordered peremptorily to "go home," and obeys, though most unwillingly, stopping some twenty paces off, and growling furiously in the darkness. Two and two we thread the narrow streets that lead down to the water's edge. The Beloochee is very silent, as is his wont, but ever and anon draws his shawl tighter round his waist, and loosens his dagger in its sheath. It is evident that he means *real business*. Manners and Ropsley chat and laugh like boys out of school. The latter never seemed half so boyish as now; the former will be a boy all his life — so much the better for him. At the bridge Ali gives a low shrill whistle. It reminds me of the night we escaped from the Cossacks in Wallachia; but the good mare this time is safe in her stable, and little thinks of the errand on which her master is bound. The whistle is answered from the water, and a double-oared caïque, with its white-robed watermen, looms through

the darkness to take us on board. As we glide silently up the Bosphorus, listening to the unearthly chorus of the baying wild-dogs answering each other from Pera to Stamboul, Manners produces a revolver from his breast-pocket, and passing his finger along the barrel shining in the starlight, observes, "Four of us, and five *here*, make nine. If the gate is only unlocked, we can carry the place by storm."

CHAPTER VIII.

"The Wolf and the Lamb."

PAPPOOSH PASHA is taking his *kief** in his harem. Two softly-shaded lamps, burning perfumed oil, shed a voluptuous light over the apartment. Rich carpets from the looms of Persia are spread upon the floor; costly shawls from Northern India fall in graceful folds over the low divan on which he reclines. Jewel-hilted sabres, silver-sheathed daggers, and fire-arms inlaid with gold, glitter above his head, disposed tastefully against the walls, and marking the warlike character of the owner; for Papoosh Pasha, cruel, sensual, and corrupt to the very marrow, is nevertheless as brave as a lion.

Two *nautch-girls* belonging to his seraglio have been dancing their voluptuous measure for his gratification. As they stand now, unveiled, panting and glowing with their exertions, the rich Eastern blood crimsoning their soft cheeks, and coursing wildly through their shapely, pliant limbs, the old man's face assumes a placid expression of content only belied by the gleam in that wicked eye, and he is good enough to wave his amber-tipped pipe-stick in token of dismissal, and to express his approbation by the single word "*Peki*" (very well).

* Repose.

The girls prostrate themselves before their lord, their silver armlets and anklets ringing as they touch the floor, and bounding away like two young antelopes, flit from the presence, apparently not unwilling to escape so easily. Papoosh Pasha is left alone with the favourite; but the favourite looks restless and pre-occupied, and glances ever and anon towards the casement which opens out into the garden of the seraglio, now beginning to glisten in the light of the rising moon, and breathing the odours of a thousand flowers, heavy and fragrant with the dews of night. This part of the harem is on the ground floor, and is a retreat much affected by his Highness for the facility with which the breeze steals into it from the Bosphorus.

Zuleika is dressed in all the magnificence of her richest Oriental costume. Her tiny feet, arched in true Arabian symmetry, are bare to the ankle, where her voluminous muslin trousers are gathered in by a bracelet, or more correctly an anklet, set with rubies and emeralds. A string of beads of the purest lemon-coloured amber marks the outlines of her slender waist, and terminates a short, close-fitting jacket of pink satin, embroidered with seed-pearls, open at the bosom, and with long sleeves fringed by lace of European manufacture. This again is covered by a large loose mantle of *green* silk, carelessly thrown over the whole figure. Zuleika has not forgotten that she is lineally descended from the Prophet, and wears his colour accordingly. Her hands, in compliance with Eastern custom, are dyed with *henna*, but even this horrid practice cannot disguise the

symmetry of her taper fingers; and although the hair is cut short on her left temple, the long raven locks from the other side are gathered and plaited into a lustrous diadem around her brows. She has pencilled her lower eye-lashes with some dark substance that enhances their natural beauty, but even this effort of the *toilette* has not succeeded in imparting the languishing expression which a Turkish beauty deems so irresistible. No; the gleam in Zuleika's eye is more that of some wild animal, caught but not tamed, glancing eagerly around for a chance of escape, and ready to tear the hand that would caress it and endeavour to reconcile it to its fetters.

She does not look as if she loved you, Papoosh Pasha, when you order her to your feet, and stroke her hair with your fat hand, and gloat on that mournful, eager face with your little twinkling eye. Better be a bachelor, Papoosh Pasha, and confine yourself to the solace of coffee and pipes, and busy your cunning intellect with those puzzling European politics, and look after the interests of your dissipated master the Sultan, than take a wild bird to your bosom that will never know you or care for you, or cease to pine and fret, and beat her breast against the bars of the cage in which you have shut her up.

The old man sinks back upon his cushions with a sigh of corporeal contentment. His fat person is enveloped in a flowing shawl gown, which admits of his breathing far more freely than does that miserable tight frock-coat he wore all day. He has gorged himself with an enormous meal, chiefly composed of

fat substances, vegetables, and sweetmeats. He has had his tiny measure of hot strong coffee, and is puffing forth volumes of smoke from a long cherry-stick pipe. He bids Zuleika kneel at his feet and sing him to his rest. The girl glances eagerly towards the window, and seems to listen; she dare not move at once to the casement and look out, for her lord is mistrustful and suspicious, and woe to her if she excites his jealousy to such a pitch that she cannot lull it to sleep again. She would give him an opiate if she dared, or something stronger still, that should settle all accounts; but there is a dark story in the harem of a former favourite—a Circassian—who tried to strike the same path for freedom, and failed in the attempt. She has long slept peacefully some forty fathom deep in the sparkling Bosphorus, and the caïques that take her former comrades to the Sweet-Waters glide along over her head without disturbing her repose. Since then, whenever Papoosh Pasha drinks in the women's apartment, he has the gallantry to insist on a lady pledging him first before he puts his own fat lips to the bowl.

"Come hither, Zuleika, little dove," says the old man, drawing her towards him; "light of my eyes and pearl of my heart, come hither that I may lay my head on thy bosom, and sleep to the soft murmurings of thy gentle voice."

The girl obeys, but glances once more uneasily towards the window, and takes her place with compressed lips, and cheeks as pale as death. A long Albanian dagger, the spoil of some lawless chief, hangs temptingly within arm's length. Another such

caress as that, Papoosh Pasha, and who shall ensure you that she does not bury it in your heart!

But a more feminine weapon is in her hand — a three-stringed lute or gittern, incapable of producing much harmony, but nevertheless affording a plaintive and not inappropriate accompaniment to the measured chant with which the reigning Odalisque lulls her master to his rest. The tones of her voice are very wild and sad. Ever and anon she stops in her music and listens to the breathing of the Pasha; so surely he opens his eyes, and raising his head from her lap bids her go on, — not angrily nor petulantly, but with a quiet overbearing malice that irritates the free spirit of the girl to the quick. She strikes the gittern with no unskilful hand; and although her voice is mournful, it is sweet and musical as she sings; but the glance of her eye denotes mischief, and I had rather be sleeping over a powder magazine with my lighted *chibouque* in my mouth, than pillow my head, as you are doing, Papoosh Pasha, on the lap of a woman maddened by tyranny and imprisonment, — her whole being filled with but two feelings — Love stronger than death; Hatred fiercer than hell. And this is the caged bird's song: —

Down in the valley where the Sweet-Waters meet — where the Sweet-Waters meet under the chesnut trees, —

There Hamed had a garden; and the wild bird sang to the Rose.

In the garden were many flowers, and the pomegranate grew in the midst. Fair and stately she grew, and the fruit from her branches dropped like dew upon the sward.

And Hamed watered the tree and pruned her, and lay down in the cool freshness of her shade.

Beautiful was the pomegranate, yet the wild bird sang to the Rose.

The Lily bent lowly to the earth, and drooped for very shame, because

the breeze courted the Lily and kissed her as he swept by to meet the Sweet-Waters under the chesnut trees.

For the Lily was the fairest of flowers; yet the wild bird sang to the Rose.

Then there came a blast from the desert, and the garden of Hamed was scorched and withered up;

And the pomegranate sickened and died; and Hamed cut her down by the roots, and sowed corn over the place of her shade.

And the breeze swept on, and stayed not, though the Lily lay trampled into the earth.

Every flower sickened and died; yet still the wild bird sang to the Rose.

In the dawn of early morning, when the sky is green with longing, and the day is at hand,

When the winds are hushed, and the waters sleep smiling, and the stars are dim in the sky;

When she pines for his coming, and spreads her petals to meet him, and droops to hear his note;

When the garden gate is open, and the watchers are asleep, and the last, last hope is dying, — will the wild bird come to the Rose?

The concluding lines she sang in a marked voice there was no mistaking, and I doubt if they did not thrill to the heart's core of more than one listener.

The moon had now fairly risen, and silvered the trees and shrubs in the harem garden with her light, leaving, however, dense masses of shade athwart the smooth lawn and under the walls of the building. Cypress and cedar quivered in her beams. Not a breath of air stirred the feathery leaves of the tall acacia, with its glistening stem; and the swelling ripple of the Bosphorus plashed drowsily against the marble steps. All was peace and silence and repose. Far enough off to elude observation, yet within hail, lay our caïque, poised buoyantly on the waters, and cutting with its dark outline right athwart a glittering pathway as of molten gold. Close under the harem window, concealed by the thick foliage of a

broad-leaved creeper, Ali Mesrour and myself crouched, silent and anxious, scarce daring to breathe, counting with sickening eagerness the precious moments that were fleeting by, so tedious yet so soon past. Twenty paces further off, under a dark group of cypresses, lay Ropsley and Manners ready for action, the latter with his hand in his bosom caressing the trusty revolver by which he set such store.

Everything had as yet gone off prosperously. We had landed noiseless and unobserved. The garden gate, thanks to woman's foresight and woman's cunning, had been left open. The sentry on guard, like all other Turkish sentries when not before an enemy, had lain down, enveloped in his great coat, with his musket by his side, and was snoring as only a true son of Osman *can* snore after a bellyfull of *pilaff*. If his lord would but follow his example, it might be done; yet never was old man so restless, so ill at ease, so wakefully disposed as seemed Papoosh Pasha.

We could see right into the apartment, and the rich soft lamplight brought out in full relief the faces and figures of its two occupants. Zuleika sat with her feet gathered under her on the divan: one hand still held the lute; the other was unwillingly consigned to the caresses of her lord. The old man's head reclined against her bosom; his parted lips betokened rest and enjoyment; his eyes were half closed, yet there was a gleam of vigilant malice upon his features that denoted anything but sleep. The poor girl's face alternated from a scowl of withering hatred to a plaintive expression of heart-

broken disappointment. Doubtless she was thinking "the last, *last* hope is dying, and the wild bird is *not* coming to the rose."

Ali Mesrour gazed on her he loved. If ever there was a trying situation, it was his — to see her even now in the very embrace of his enemy — so near, yet so apart. Few men could have enough preserved their self-command not to betray even by the workings of the countenance what a storm of feelings must be wasting the heart; yet the Beloochee moved not a muscle; his profile, turned towards me, was calm and grim as that of a statue. Once only the right hand crept stealthily towards his dagger, but the next moment he was again as still as death. The Pasha whispered something in the girl's ear, and a gleam of wild delight sparkled on her face as she listened. She rose cheerfully, left the room with a rapid, springing step, and returned almost immediately with a flask under her arm, and a huge goblet set with precious stones in her hand. Papoosh Pasha, true believer and faithful servant of the Prophet, it needs not the aid of a metal-covered cork, secured with wire, to enable us to guess at the contents of that Frankish flask. No sherbet of roses is poured into your brimming goblet — no harmless, unfermented liquor, flavoured with cinnamon or other lawful condiment; but the creaming flood of amber-coloured champagne whirls up to the very margin, and the Pasha's eye brightens with satisfaction as he stretches forth his hand to grasp its taper stem. Cunning and careful though, even in his debauches, he proffers the cup to Zuleika ere he tastes.

"Drink, my child," says the old hypocrite, "drink of the liquid such as the houris are keeping in Paradise for the souls of the true believers; drink and fear not — it is lawful. *Allah Kerim!*"

Zuleika wets her lips on the edge, and hands the cup to her lord, who drains it to the dregs, and sets it down with a sigh of intense satisfaction.

"It is lawful," he continues, wiping his mustaches. "It is not forbidden by the blessed Prophet. Wine indeed is prohibited to the true believer, but the Prophet knew not the flavour of champagne, and had he tasted it, he would have enjoined his servants to drink it four times a day. Fill again, Zuleika, oh my soul! Fill again! There is but one Allah!"

The girl needs no second bidding; once and again she fills to the brim; once and again the Pasha drains the tempting draught; and now the little twinkling eye dims, the cherry-stick falls from the opening fingers, the Pasha's head sinks upon Zuleika's bosom, and at last he is fast asleep. Gently, tenderly, like a mother soothing a child, she hushes him to his rest. Stealthily, slowly she transfers his head from her own breast to the embroidered cushions. Dexterously, noiselessly, she extricates herself from his embrace. A low whistle, scarcely perceptible, reaches her ear from the garden, and calls the blood into her cheek; and yet, a very woman even now, she turns to take one last look at him whom she is leaving for ever. A cool air steals in from the window, and plays upon the sleeper's open neck and throat. She draws a shawl carefully, nay, caressingly, around

him. Brute, tyrant, enemy though he is, yet there have been moments when he was kindly and indulgent towards her, for she was his favourite; and she will not leave him in anger at the last. Fatal delay! mistaken tenderness! true woman! always influenced by her feelings at the wrong time! What did that moment's weakness cost us all? She had crossed the room — we were ready to receive her — her foot was on the very window-sill; another moment and she would have been in Ali's arms, when a footstep was heard rapidly approaching up the street, a black figure came bounding over the garden wall, closely followed by a large English retriever, and shouting an alarm wildly at the top of his voice. As the confused sentry fired off his musket in the air; as the Pasha's guards and retainers woke and sprang to their arms; as the Beloochee glared wildly around him; as Ropsley, no longer uninterested, swore volubly in English, and Manners drew the revolver from his bosom, Bold, for the second time that day, pinned a tall negro slave by the throat, and rolling him over and over on the sward, made as though he would have worried him to death in the garden.

It was, however, too late; the alarm was given, and all was discovered. The man I had struck in the afternoon of that very day had dogged me ever since, in hopes of an opportunity to revenge himself. He had followed me from place to place, overheard my conversation, and watched all those to whom I spoke. He had crouched under the sentry box at the door of Messirie's Hotel, had tracked us at a safe distance down to the very water's edge, and had seen

us embark on our mysterious expedition. With the cunning of his race, he guessed at once at our object, and determined to frustrate it. Unable, I conclude, at that late hour to get a caïque, he had hastened by land to his master's house, and, as the event turned out, had arrived in time to overthrow all our plans. He was followed in his turn by my faithful Bold, who, when so peremptorily ordered to leave us, had been convinced there was something in the wind, and accordingly transferred his attentions to the figure that had been his object of distrust the livelong day. How he worried and tore at him, and refused to relinquish his hold. Alas! alas! it was too late — too late!

The Pasha sprang like a lion from his lair. At the same instant, Ali Mesrour and myself bounded lightly through the open window into the apartment. Zuleika flung herself with a loud shriek into her lover's arms. Manners and Ropsley came crowding in behind us, the former's revolver gleaming ominously in the light. The Pasha was surrounded by his enemies, but he never faltered for an instant. Hurrying feet and the clash of arms resounded along the passages; lights were already twinkling in the garden; aid was at hand, and, Turk, tyrant, voluptuary though he was, he lacked not the courage, the promptitude which aids itself. At a glance he must have recognised Ali; or it might have been but the instinct of his nation which bid him defend his women. Quick as thought, he seized a pistol that hung above his couch, and discharged it point blank at the Beloochee's body. The bullet sped past

Zuleika's head and lodged deep in her lover's bosom. At the same instant that Ropsley, always cool and collected in an emergency, dashed down both the lamps, Ali's body lurched heavily into my arms, and poor Zuleika fell senseless on the floor.

The next moment a glare of light filled the apartment. Crowds of slaves, black and white, all armed to the teeth, rushed in to the rescue. The Pasha, perfectly composed, ordered them to seize and make us prisoners. Encumbered by the Beloochee's weight, and outnumbered ten to one, we were put to it to make good our retreat, and ere we could close round her and carry her off, two stout negroes had borne the still senseless Zuleika through the open doorway into the inner chambers of the palace. Placing the Beloochee between myself and Ropsley, we backed leisurely into the garden, the poor fellow groaning heavily as we handed him through the casement, and so made our way, still fronting the Pasha and his myrmidons, towards our caïque, which at the first signal of disturbance had been pulled rapidly inshore. Manners covered our retreat with great steadiness and gallantry, keeping the enemy at bay with his revolver, a weapon with which one and all showed much disinclination to make further acquaintance. By this time shrieks of women pervaded the palace. The blacks, too, jabbered and gesticulated with considerably more energy than purpose, half-a-dozen pistol-shots fired at random served to increase the general confusion, which even their lord's presence and authority were completely powerless to quell, and thus we were enabled to reach our

boat, and shove off with our ghastly freight into the comparative safety of the Bosphorus.

"He will never want a doctor more;" said Ropsley, in answer to an observation from Manners, as, turning down the edge of the Beloochee's jacket, he showed us the round livid mark that, to a practised eye, told too surely of the irremediable death-wound. "Poor fellow, poor fellow," he added, "he is bleeding inwardly now, he will be dead before we reach the bridge."

Ali opened his eyes, and raising his head, looked around as though in search of some missing face —

"Zuleika," he whispered, "Zuleika!" and sank back again with a piteous expression of hopeless, helpless misery on his wan and ghastly features. The end was obviously near at hand, his cheeks seemed to have fallen in the last few minutes, dark circles gathered round his eyes, his forehead was damp and clammy, and there was a light froth upon his ashy lips. Yet as death approached he seemed to recover strength and consciousness, a true Mussulman, the grave had for him but few terrors, and he had confronted the grim monarch so often as not to wince from him at last when really within his grasp.

He reared himself in the boat, and supported by my arm, which was wound round his body, made shift to sit upright and look about him, wildly, dreamily, as one who looks for the last time. "Effendi," he gasped, pressing my hand, "Effendi, it is destiny. The good mare — she is my brother's! Oh Zuleika! Zuleika!"

A strong shudder convulsed his frame, his jaw

dropped, I thought he was gone, but he recovered consciousness once more, snatched wildly at his sword, which he half drew, and whispering faintly “turn me to the East! There is but one Allah!” his limbs collapsed — his head sunk upon my shoulder — and so he died.

Row gently, brawny watermen, though your freight is indeed but the shell which contained even now a gallant faithful spirit. One short hour ago, who so determined, so brave, so sagacious as the Beloochee warrior? and where is he now? That is not Ali Mesrour whom you are wafting so sadly, so smoothly towards the shore. Ali Mesrour is far away in space, in the material Paradise of your own creed, with its inexhaustible sherbets, and its cool gardens, and its dark-eyed maidens waving their green scarfs to greet the long-expected lover; or to the unknown region, the shadowy spirit-land of a loftier, nobler faith, the mystical world on which Religion herself dare hardly speculate, where “the tree shall be known by its fruits,” “where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.”

So we carried him reverently and mournfully to the house he had occupied; and we laid him out in his warrior dress, with his arms by his side and his lance in his hand, and ere the morrow’s sun was midway in the heavens, the earth had closed over him in his last resting-place where the dark cypresses are nodding and whispering over his tomb, and the breeze steals gently up from the golden Bosphorus, smiling and radiant, within a hundred paces of his grave.

The good bay mare has never left my possession. For months she was restless and uncomfortable, neighing at every strange step, and refusing her food, as if she pined truly and faithfully for her master. He came not, and after a time she forgot him; and another hand fed and cared for her, and she grew sleek and fat and light-hearted. What would you? It is a world of change. Men and women, friends and favourites, lovers and beloved, all must forget and float with the stream and hurry on; if there be an exception — if some pale-eyed mourner, clinging to the bank, yearns hopelessly for the irrevocable Past, what matter, so the stream can eddy round him, and laugh and ripple by? Let him alone! he is not one of *us*. God forbid!

Of Zuleika's fate I shudder to think. Though I might well guess she could never expect to be forgiven, it was long before surmise approached certainty, and even now I strive to hope against hope, to persuade myself that there may still be a chance. At least I am thankful Ali was spared the ghastly tidings that eventually came to my ears — a tale that escaped the lips of a drunken caïgee, and in which I fear there is too much truth.

Of course the attack on the Pasha's palace created much scandal throughout Constantinople; and equally of course, a thousand rumours gained credence as to the origin and object of the disturbance. The English officers concerned received a hint that it would be advisable to get out of the way as speedily as possible; and I was compelled to absent myself for a time from my kind friend and patron, Omar Pasha.

One person set the whole thing down as a drunken frolic; another voted it an attempt at burglary of the most ruffian-like description; and the Turks themselves seemed inclined to resent it as a gratuitous insult to their prejudices and customs. A stalwart caigee, however, being, contrary to his religion and his practice, inebriated with strong drink, let out in his cups that, if he dared, he could tell more than others knew about the attack on the palace of Papoosh Pasha, and its sequel. Influenced by a large bribe, and intimidated by threats, he at length made the following statement: — “That the evening after the attack, about sundown, he was plying off the steps of Papoosh Pasha’s palace, that he was hailed by a negro guard, who bade him approach the landing-place; that two other negroes then appeared, bearing between them a sack, carefully secured, and obviously containing something weighty; that they placed it carefully in the bottom of his caïque, and that more than once he distinctly saw it move; that they desired him to pull out into mid-stream, and when there, dropped the sack overboard; that it sunk immediately, but that he fancied he heard a faint shriek as it went down, and saw the bubbles plainly coming up for several seconds, at the place where it disappeared; further, that the negro gave him fifty piasters over his proper fare for the job, and that he himself had been uncomfortable and troubled with bad dreams ever since.”

Alas, poor Zuleika! there is but little hope that you survived your lover four-and-twenty hours. The wild-bird came, indeed, as he had promised, in the

early morning, to the rose, but the wild-bird got his death-wound; and the rose, I fear, lies many a fathom deep in the clear, cold waters of the silent Bosphorus.

CHAPTER IX.

Man has been variously defined by philosophers, as a cooking animal (the truth of this definition, in- less when applied to our Gallic neighbours, I stoutly contest), as a reasoning animal (this likewise will hardly hold water), as a self-clothing animal, as an omnivorous one, as an unlettered piped, and as an improved specimen of the order of Simiae without the tail. None of these definitions will I accept as ex- pressing exactly the conditions and necessities of our species. I believe man to be an animal fed on ex- citement — the only one in creation that without that pabulum, in some shape or another, languishes, becomes torpid, and loses its noblest energies both of mind and body. Why do men drink, quarrel, gamble, and waste their substance in riotous living? Why does Satan, according to good Dr. Watts, al- ways provide work "for idle hands to do?" Why, but because man must have excitement. If he have no safety-valve for his surplus energies in the labour which earns his daily bread, they will find vent through some other channel, either for good or evil, according to his bias one way or the other. There is no such thing as repose on the face of the earth — push on — keep moving, such is the motto of hu- manity. If we are not making we must be marring.

CHAPTER IX.

"The Front."

MAN has been variously defined by philosophers as a cooking animal (the truth of this definition, unless when applied to our Gallic neighbours, I stoutly contest), as a reasoning animal (this likewise will hardly hold water), as a self-clothing animal, as an omnivorous one, as an unfeathered biped, and as an improved specimen of the order of Simiæ without the tail! None of these definitions will I accept as expressing exactly the conditions and necessities of our species. I believe man to be an animal fed on excitement — the only one in creation that without that pabulum, in some shape or another, languishes, becomes torpid, and loses its noblest energies both of mind and body. Why do men drink, quarrel, gamble, and waste their substance in riotous living? Why does Satan, according to good Dr. Watts, always provide work "for idle hands to do?" Why, but because man *must* have excitement. If he have no safety-valve for his surplus energies in the labour which earns his daily bread, they will find vent through some other channel, either for good or evil, according to his bias one way or the other. There is no such thing as repose on the face of the earth; "push on — keep moving," such is the motto of humanity. If we are not making we must be marring,

but we cannot sit still. How else do we account for the proverbial restlessness of the sailor when he has been a few weeks ashore? How else can we conceive it possible for a rational being, whilst enjoying the luxuries and liberty of a landsman's existence, to pine for the hardships, the restraint, the utter discomfort which every one must necessarily experience on board ship? How, except upon this principle, can we understand the charm of a soldier's life, the cheering influence of a campaign? It is most unnatural to like rigid discipline, short rations, constant anxiety, and unremitting toil. A wet greatcoat on the damp earth is a bad substitute for a four-post bed, with thick blankets, and clean sheets not innocent of the warming-pan. A tent is a miserable dwelling-place at the best of times, and is only just preferable to the canopy of heaven in very hot or very cold, or very windy or very wet weather. There is small amusement in spending the livelong night in sleepless watching for an enemy, and little satisfaction in being surprised by the same about an hour before dawn. It is annoying to be starved, it is irritating to be frightened, it is uncomfortable to be shot, — yet are all these casualties more or less incidental to the profession of arms; and still the recruiting sergeant flaunts his bunch of ribbons in every market town throughout merry England, and still the bumpkin takes the shilling, and sings in beery strains, "Huzza for the life of a soldier!"

And I too had tasted of the fierce excitement of strife — had drunk of the stimulating draught which, like some bitter tonic, creates a constant craving for

more — had been taught by the influence of custom and companionship to loathe the quiet dreamy existence which was my normal state, and to long for the thrill of danger, the variety and unholy revelry of war.

So I returned with Ropsley to the Crimea. I had small difficulty in obtaining leave from Omar Pasha to resign, at least for a time, my appointment on his personal staff.

"They are queer fellows, my adopted countrymen," said his Highness, in his dry, humorous manner, and with his quaint smile, "and the sooner you get out of the way, friend Egerton, the better. I shall be asked all sorts of questions about you myself; and if you stay here, why, the nights are dark and the streets are narrow. Some fine morning it might be difficult to wake you, and nobody would be a bit the wiser. Our Turk has his peculiar notions about the laws of honour, and he cannot be made to comprehend why he should risk his own life in taking yours. Besides, he is ridiculously sensitive about his women, particularly with a Christian. Had you been a good Mussulman, now, Egerton, it could have been easily arranged. You might have bought the lady, got drunk on champagne with old Papoosh Pasha, and set up a harem of your own. Why don't you become a convert, as I did? The process is short, the faith simple, the practice satisfactory. Think it over, my good Interpreter, think it over. Bah! in ten minutes you would be as good a Mussulman as I am, and better." And his Highness laughed, and bid me "Good-bye," for he had a

good deal upon his hands just then, being on the eve of marriage with his *fifth* wife, a young lady twelve years of age, daughter to his Imperial Majesty the Sultan, and bringing her husband a magnificent dowry of jewels, gold, and horses, in addition to many broad and fertile acres in Anatolia, not to mention a beautiful kiosk near Scutari and a stately palace on the Bosphorus, without which adventitious advantages she might perhaps have hardly succeeded in winning the heart of so experienced a warrior as Omar Pasha.

Thus it was that I found myself one broiling sunny morning leaning over the side of a transport just then dropping her anchor in Balaclava Bay.

The scorching rocks frowned down on the scorching sea; the very planks on the deck glistened with the heat. There was no shade on land, and not a breath of air ruffled the shining bosom of the water. The harbour was full, ay, choked with craft of every rig and every tonnage; whilst long wicked-looking steamers and huge unwieldy troop-ships dotted the surface of the land-locked bay. The union-jack trailed idly over our stern, the men were all on deck, gazing with eager faces on that shore which combined for *them* the realities of history with the fascinations of romance. — Young soldiers were they, mostly striplings of eighteen and twenty summers, with the smooth cheeks, fresh colour, and stalwart limbs of the Anglo-Saxon race — too good to fill a trench! And yet what would be the fate of at least two-thirds of that keen light-hearted draft? *Vestigia nulla retrorsum.* Many a time has it made my heart

ache to see a troop-ship ploughing relentlessly onward with her living freight to "the front" — many a time have I recalled Æsop's fable, and the footprints that were all *towards* the lion's den — many a time have I thought how every unit there in red was himself the centre of a little world at home; and of the grey heads that would tremble, and the loving faces that would pale in peaceful villages far away in England, when no news came from foreign parts of "our John," or when the unrelenting *Gazette* arrived at last and proclaimed, as too surely it would, that he was coming back "never, never no more."

Boom! — there it is again! Every eye lightens at that dull, distant sound. Every man's pulse beats quicker, and his head towers more erect, for he feels that he has arrived at the *real thing* at last. No sham fighting is going on over yonder, not two short leagues from where he stands — no mock bivouac at Chobham, nor practice in Woolwich Marshes, nor meaningless pageant in the Park: that iron voice carries *death* upon its every accent. For those in the trenches it is a mere echo — the unregarded consequence that necessarily succeeds the fierce rush of a round shot or the wicked whistle of a shell; but for us here at Balaclava, it is one of the pulsations of England's life-blood — one of the ticks, so to speak, of that great Clock of Doom which points ominously to the downfall of the beleaguered town.

Boom! Yes, there it is again; you cannot forget why you are here. Day and night, sunshine and storm, scarce five minutes elapse in the twenty-four hours without reminding you of the work in hand.

You ride out from the camp for your afternoon exercise, you go down to Balaclava to buy provisions, or you canter over to the monastery at St. George's, to visit a sick comrade — the iron voice tolls on. In the glare of noon, when everything else seems drowsy in the heat, and the men lie down exhausted in the suffocating trenches — the iron voice tolls on. In the calm of evening, when the breeze is hushed and still, and the violet sea is sleeping in the twilight — the iron voice tolls on. So when the flowers are opening in the morning, and the birds begin to sing, and reviving nature, fresh and dewy, seems to scatter health and peace and goodwill over the earth — the iron voice tolls on. Nay, when you wake at midnight in your tent from a dream of your far-away home — oh! what a different scene to this! — tired as you may be, ere you have turned to sleep once more, you hear it again. Yes, at midnight as at noon, at morn as at evening, every day and all day long, Death is gathering his harvest — and the iron voice tolls on.

“Very slack fire they seem to be keeping up in the front,” yawns out Ropsley, who has just joined me on deck, and to whom the siege and all its accessories are indeed nothing new. Many a long and weary month has he been listening to that sound; and what with his own ideas on the subject, and the information a naturally acute intellect has acquired touching the proceedings of the besiegers, his is indeed a familiarity which “breeds contempt.”

“Any news from the camp?” he shouts out to a middy in a man-of-war's boat passing under our

stern. The middy, a thorough specimen of an English boy, with his round laughing face and short jacket, stands up to reply.

"Another sortie! No end of fellows killed; and *they say* the Malakhoff is blown up."

Our young soldiers listen eagerly to the news. They have heard and read of the Malakhoff for many a day, and though their ideas of the nature and appearance of that work are probably of a somewhat confused description, they are all athirst for intelligence, and prepared to swallow everything connected with the destruction of that or any other of the defences with a faith that is, to say the least of it, a sad temptation to the laughter-loving informant.

A middy, though from some organic cause of which I am ignorant, is always restless and impatient towards the hour of noon; and our friend plumps down once more in the stern of his gig, and bids his men "give way;" for the sun is by this time high in the heavens; so we take our places in the ship's boat which our own captain politely provides for us, and avoiding the confusion of a disembarkation of men and stores, Ropsley, Bold, and I leap ashore at Balaclava, unencumbered save by the slender allowance of luggage which a campaign teaches the most luxurious to deem sufficient.

Ashore at Balaclava! What a scene of hurry and crowding and general confusion it is! Were it not that every second individual is in uniform and bearded to the waist, it would appear more like the mart of some peaceful and commercial seaport, than

the threshold of a stage on which is being fought out to the death one of the fiercest and most obstinate struggles which history has to record on her blood-stained pages. There are no women, yet the din of tongues is perfectly deafening. Hurrying to and fro, doing as little work with as much labour as possible, making immense haste with small speed, and vociferating incessantly at the top of their voices, Turks and Tartars, Armenians, Greeks, and Ionians, all accosted by the burly English soldier under the generic name of "Johnny," are flitting aimlessly about, and wasting her Majesty's stores in a manner that would have driven the late Mr. Hume frantic. Here a trim sergeant of infantry, clean and orderly, despite his war-worn looks and patched garments, drives before him a couple of swarthy nondescripts, clad in frieze, and with wild elf-locks protruding over their jutting foreheads, and twinkling Tartar eyes. They stagger under huge sacks of meal, which they are carrying to yonder storehouse, with a sentry pacing his short walk at the door. The sacks have been furnished by contract, so the seams are badly sewn; and the meal, likewise furnished by contract, and of inferior quality, is rapidly escaping, to leave a white track in the mud, also a contract article, and of the deepest, stickiest, and most enduring quality. The labours of the two porters will be much lightened ere they reach their destination; but this is of less moment, inasmuch as the storehouse to which they are proceeding is by no means watertight, and the first thunderstorm that sweeps in from the Black Sea is likely much to damage its

contents. It is needless to add that this edifice of thin deal planks has been constructed by contract for the use of her Majesty's Government.

A little further on, a train of mules, guided by a motley crowd of every nation under heaven, and commanded by an officer in the workmanlike uniform of the Land Transport, is winding slowly up the hill. They have emerged from a perfect sea of mud, which even at this dry season shows not the least tendency to harden into consistency, and they will probably arrive at the front in about four hours, with the loss of a third only of their cargo, consisting of sundry munitions which were indispensable last week, and might have been of service the day before yesterday, but the occasion for which has now passed away for ever.

A staff officer on a short sturdy pony gallops hastily by, exchanging a nod as he passes with a beardless cornet of Dragoons, whose English charger presents a curious study of the anatomy of a horse. He pulls up for an instant to speak to Ropsley, and the latter turns to me and says,

“Not so bad as I feared, Vere. It was a mere sortie, after all, and we drove them back very handsomely, with small loss on our side. The only officer killed was young ——, and he was dying, poor fellow! at any rate, of dysentery.”

This is the news of the day here, and the trenches form just such a subject of conversation before Sebastopol as does the weather in a country-house in England — a topic never new, but never entirely worn out.

Side by side, Ropsley and myself are journeying up the hill towards the front. A sturdy bât-man has been in daily expectation of his master's return, and has brought his horses down to meet him. It is indeed a comfort to be again in an English saddle — to have the lengthy, powerful frame of an English horse under one — and to hear the homely, honest accents of a *provincial* English tongue. When a man has been long amongst foreigners, and especially serving with foreign troops, it is like being at home again to be once more within the lines of a British army; and to add to the pleasure of our ride, although the day is cloudless and insufferably hot in the valleys, there is a fresh breeze up here, and a pure bracing air that reaches us from the heights on which the army is encamped.

It is a wild, picturesque scene, not beautiful, yet full of interest and incident. Behind us lies Balaclava, with its thronging harbour and its busy crowds, whose hum reaches us even here, high above the din. It is like looking down on an ant-hill to watch the movements of the shifting swarm.

On our right, the plain, stretching far and wide, is dotted with the Land Transport — that necessary evil so essential to the very existence of an army; and their clustering wagons and scattered beasts carry the eye onwards to a dim white line formed by the neat tents and orderly encampment of the flower of French cavalry, the gallant and dashing Chasseurs d'Afrique.

On our left, the stable call of an English regi-

ment of Light Dragoons reaches us from the valley of Kadikoi, that Crimean Newmarket, the doings of which are actually chronicled in *Bell's Life*! Certainly an Englishman's nationality is not to be rooted out of him even in the jaws of death. But we have little time to visit the race-course or the lines — to pass our comments on the condition of the troopers, or gaze open-mouthed at the wondrous field-batteries that occupy an adjoining encampment — moved by teams of twelve horses each, perhaps the finest animals of the class to be seen in Europe, with every accessory of carriage, harness, and appointments, so perfect as not to admit of improvement, yet, I believe, not found to answer in actual warfare. Our interest is more awakened by another scene. We are on classic ground now, for we have reached the spot whence

Into the valley of death
Rode the six hundred!

Yes, stretching down from our very feet, lies that mile-and-a-half gallop which witnessed the boldest deed of chivalry performed in ancient or modern times. Well might the French general exclaim, "*C'est magnifique!*" although he added, significantly, "*mais ce n'est pas la guerre.*" The latter part of his observation is a subject for discussion, but of the former there is and there can be but one opinion. *Magnifique* indeed it must have been to see six hundred horsemen ride gallantly down to almost certain death — every heart beating equally high, every sword striking equally hard and true.

Groom fought like noble, squire like knight,
As fearlessly and well.

Not a child in England at this day but knows, as if he had been there, the immortal battle of Balaclava. It is needless to describe its situation, to dwell upon the position they were ordered to carry, or the fire that poured in upon front, flanks, ay, and rear, of the attacking force. This is all matter of history; but as the valley stretched beneath us, fresh, green, and smiling peacefully in the sun, it required but little imagination to call up the stirring scene of which it had been the stage. Here was the very ground on which the Light Brigade were drawn up; every charger quivering with excitement, every eye flashing, every lip compressed with the sense of coming danger. A staff officer rides up to the leader and communicates an order. There is an instant's pause. Question and reply pass like lightning, and the aide-de-camp points to a dark, grim mass of artillery bristling far away down yonder in the front. Men's hearts stop beating, and many a bold cheek turns pale, for there is more excitement in uncertainty than in actual danger. The leader draws his sword, and faces flush, and hearts beat high once more. Clear and sonorous is his voice as he gives the well-known word; gallant and chivalrous his bearing as he takes his place — that place of privilege — *in front* — "*Noblesse oblige*," and can he be otherwise than gallant and chivalrous and devoted, for is he not a *gentleman*? and yet, to the honour of our countrymen be it spoken, not a man of that six hundred, of any rank, but was as

gallant and chivalrous and devoted as he — he has said so himself a hundred times.

So the word is given and the squadron leaders take it up, and the Light Brigade advances at a gallop; and a deadly grasp is on the sword, and the charger feels his rider's energy as he grips him with his knees, and holding him hard by the head urges him resolutely forward — to death!

And now they cross the line of fire: shot through the heart, an aide-de-camp falls headlong from the saddle, and his loose horse gallops on, wild and masterless, and wheels in upon the flank, and joins the squadron once more. It has begun now. Man upon man, horse upon horse, are shot down and rolled over; yet the survivors close in, sterner, bolder, fiercer than before, and still the death-ride sweeps on.

"Steady, men — forward!" shouts a chivalrous squadron-leader, as he waves his glittering sword above his head, and points towards the foe. Clear and cheerful rings his voice above the tramp of horses and the rattle of small-arms and the deadly roar of artillery. He is a model of beauty, youth, and gallantry — the admired of men, the darling of women, the hope of his house. — Do not look again. — A round shot has aken man and horse, he is lying rolled up with his charger, a confused and ghastly mass. Forward! the squadron has passed over him, and still the death-ride sweeps on.

The gaps are awful now, the men told off by threes look in vain for the familiar face at right or

left; every trooper feels that he must depend on himself and the good horse under him, but there is no wavering. Officers begin to have misgivings as to the result, but there is no hesitation. All know they are galloping to destruction, yet not a heart fails, not a rein is turned. Few, very few are they by this time, and still the death-ride sweeps on. They disappear in that rolling sulphurous cloud, the portal of another world; begrimed with smoke, ghastly with wounds, comrade cannot recognise comrade, and officers look wildly round for their men; but the guns are still before them — the object is not yet attained — the enemy awaits them steadily behind his gabions, and the fire from his batteries is mowing them down like grass. If but one man is left, that one will still press forward: and now they are on their prey. A tremendous roar of artillery shakes the air. Mingled with the clash of swords and the plunge of horses, oath, prayer, and death-shriek fly to heaven. The batteries are reached and carried. The death-ride sweeps over them, and it is time to return.

* * * * *

In twos, and threes, and single files, the few survivors stagger back to the ground from whence, a few short minutes ago a gallant band had advanced in so trim, so orderly, so soldierlike a line.

The object has been attained, but at what a sacrifice! Look at yon stalwart trooper sinking on his saddle-bow, sick with his death-hurt, his head drooping on his bosom, his sword hanging idly in

his paralysed right-hand, his failing charger, wounded and feeble, nobly bearing his master to safety ere he falls to rise no more. The soldier's eye brightens for an instant as he hears the cheer of the Heavy Brigade completing the work he has pawned his life to begin. Soon that eye will glaze and close for ever. Men look round for those they knew and loved, and fear to ask for the comrade who is down, stiff and stark, under those dismounted guns and devastated batteries; horses come galloping in without riders; here and there a dismounted dragoon crawls feebly back to join the remnants of what was once his squadron, and by degrees the few survivors get together and form something like an ordered body once more. It is better not to count them, they are so few, so *very* few. Weep, England, for thy chivalry! mourn and wring thy hands for that disastrous day; but smile with pride through thy tears, thrill with exultation in thy sorrow, to think of the sons thou canst boast, of the deed of arms done by them in that valley before the eyes of gathered nations — of the immortal six hundred — thy children, every man of them, that rode the glorious death-ride of Balaclava!

"That was a stupid business," observed Ropsley, as he brought his horse alongside of mine, and pointed down the valley; "quite a mistake from beginning to end. What a licking we deserved to get, and what a licking we *should* have got if our dragoons were not the only cavalry in the world that will *ride straight!*"

"And yet what a glorious day!" I exclaimed,

for the wild cheer of a charge seemed even now to be thrilling in my ears. "What a chance for a man to have! even if he did not survive it. What a proud sight for the army. Oh, Ropsley, what would I give to have been there!"

"*Not whist*, my dear fellow," replied my less enthusiastic friend; "that is not the way to *play the game*, and no man who makes mistakes deserves to *win*. I have a theory of my own about cavalry, they should never be offered too freely. I would almost go so far as to say they should not be used till a battle is won. At least they should be kept in hand till the last moment, and then let loose like lightning. What said the Duke? 'There are no cavalry on earth like mine, but I can only use them *once*;' and no man knew so well as he did the merits and the failings of each particular arm. Nor should you bring the same men out again too soon after a brilliant charge; let them have a little time to get over it, they will *come* again all the better. Never *waste* anything in war, and never run a chance when you can stand on a certainty. But here we are at the camp of the First Division. Yonder you may catch a glimpse of the harbour and a few houses of the town of Sebastopol. How quiet it looks this fine day! quite the sort of place to take the children to for sea-bathing at this time of year! I am getting tired of the *outside*, though, Egerton; I sometimes think we shall *never* get in. There they go again," he added, as a white volume of smoke rose slowly into the clear air, and a heavy report broke dully on our ears, "there they go again, but what a

slack fire they seem to be keeping up; we shall never do any good till we try a *coup de main*, and take the place by assault;" so speaking, Ropsley picked his way carefully amongst tent-ropes and tent-pegs, and all the impediments of a camp, to reach the main street, so to speak, of that canvas town, and I followed him, gazing around me with a curiosity rather sharpened than damped by the actual warfare I had already seen on so much smaller a scale.

There must have been at least two hundred thousand men at that time disposed around the beleaguered town, this without counting the Land Transport and followers of an army, or the crowds of non-combatants that thronged the ports of Kamiesch and Balaclava. The white town of tents stretched away for miles, divided and subdivided into streets and alleys; you had only to know the number of his regiment to find a private soldier, with as great a certainty as you could find an individual in London if you knew the number of his house and the name of the street where he resided — always pre-supposing that the soldier had not been killed the night before in the trenches, a casualty by no means to be overlooked. We rode down the main street of the Guards' division, admired the mountaineer on sentry at the adjoining camp of the Highland brigade, and pulled up to find ourselves at home at the door of Ropsley's tent, to which humble abode my friend welcomed me with as courteous an air and as much concern for my comfort as he would have done in his own luxurious lodgings in the heart of May-fair.

A soldier's life had certainly much altered Ropsley for the better. I could see he was popular in his regiment. The men seemed to welcome back the Colonel (a captain in the Guards holds the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the army), and his brother officers thronged into his tent ere we had well entered it ourselves, to tell him the latest particulars of the siege, and the ghastly news that every morning brought fresh and bloody from the trenches.

As a stranger, or rather as a guest, I was provided with the seat of honour, an old, shrivelled bullock-trunk that had escaped the general loss of baggage on the landing of the army, previous to the battle of the Alma, and which, set against the tent-pole for a "back," formed a commodious and delightful resting-place. The said tent-pole, besides being literally the main-stay and prop of the establishment, fulfilling all the functions of a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, and a dressing-table; for from certain nails artfully disposed on its slender circumference, depended the few articles of costume and necessaries of the toilet which formed the whole worldly wealth of the *ci-devant* London dandy.

The dandy aforesaid, sitting on his camp-bedstead in his ragged flannel-shirt, and sharing that seat with two other dandies more ragged than himself, pledged his guest in a silver-gilt measure of pale-ale, brought up from Balaclava at a cost of about half-a-guinea a bottle, and drank with a gusto such as the best-flavoured champagne had never wooed from a palate formerly too delicate and fastidious to be pleased

with the nectar of the immortals themselves, now appreciating with exquisite enjoyment the strongest liquids, the most acrid tobacco, nay, the Irish stew itself, cooked by a private soldier at a camp-fire, savoury and delicious, if glutinous with grease and reeking of onions.

"Heavy business the night before last," said a young Guardsman with a beautiful girlish face, and a pair of uncommonly dirty hands garnished with costly rings — a lad that looked as if he ought to be still at school, but uniting the cool courage of a man with the mischievous light-hearted spirits of a boy. "Couldn't get a wink of sleep for them at any time — never knew 'em so restless. Tell you what, Colonel 'rats leave a falling house,' it's my belief there's *something up* now, else why were we all relieved at twelve o'clock instead of our regular twenty-four hours in the trenches? Good job for me, for I breakfasted with the General, and a precious blow-out he gave me. Turkey, my boys! and cherry-brandy out of a shaving-pot! Do you call that nothing?"

"Were you in the advanced trenches?" inquired Ropsley, stopping our young friend's gastronomic recollections; "and did you see poor — killed?"

The lad's face fell in an instant; it was with a saddened and altered voice that he replied.

"Poor Charlie! yes, I was close to him when he was hit. You know it was his first night in the trenches, and he was like a boy out of school. Well,

the beggars made a sortie, you know, on the left of our right attack: they couldn't have chosen a worse place; and he and I were with the light company when we drove them back. The men behaved admirably, Colonel; and poor Charlie was so delighted, not being used to it, you know," proceeded the urchin, with the gravity of a veteran, "that it was impossible to keep him within bounds. He had a revolver (that wouldn't go off, by the way), and he had filled a soda-water bottle with powder and bullets and odd bits of iron, like a sort of mimic shell. Well, this thing burst in his hand, and deuced near blew his arm off, but it only made him keener. When the Russians retired, he actually ran out in front and threw stones at them. I tried all I could to stop him." (The lad's voice was getting husky now.) "Well, Colonel, it was bright moonlight, and I saw a Russian private take a regular 'pot-shot' at poor Charlie. He hit him just below the waist-belt; and we dragged him into the trenches, and there he — he died. Colonel, this 'baccy of yours is very strong, I'll — I'll just walk into the air for a moment, if you'll excuse me. I'll be back directly."

So he rose and walked out, with his face turned from us all; and though there was nothing to be ashamed of in the weakness, I think not one of us but knew he had gone away to have his "cry" out, and liked him all the better for his mock manliness and his feeling heart.

Ere he came back again the bugles were sounding for afternoon parade. Orderly corporals were

running about with small slips of paper in their hands, the men were falling in, and the fresh relief, so diminished every four-and-twenty hours, was again being got ready for the work of death in the trenches.

CHAPTER X.

"A Quiet Night."

ON an elevated *plateau*, sloping downward to a ravine absolutely paved with iron, in the remains of shot and shell fired from the town during its protracted and vigorous defence, are formed in open column "the duties" from the different regiments destined to carry on the siege for the next four-and-twenty hours. Those who are only accustomed to see British soldiers marshalled neat and orderly in Hyde Park, or manœuvring like clock-work in "the Phoenix," would hardly recognise in that motley, war-worn band the staid and uniform figures which they are accustomed to contemplate with pride and satisfaction as the "money's-worth" of a somewhat oppressive taxation. The Highlanders — partly from the fortune of war, partly from the nature of their dress — are less altered from their normal exterior than the rest of the army, and the Guardsman's tall figure and bearskin cap still stamp him a Guardsman, notwithstanding patched clothing and much-worn accoutrements; but some of the line regiments, which have suffered considerably during the siege, present the appearance of regular troops only in their martial bearing and the scrupulous discipline observed within their ranks. To the eye of a soldier, however, there is something very pleasing and "workmanlike" in

the healthy, confident air of the men, and the "matter-of-course" manner in which they seem to contemplate the duty before them. Though their coats may be out at elbows, their firelocks are bright and in good order, while the havresacks and canteens slung at their sides, seem to have been carefully replenished with a view to keeping up that physical vigour and stamina for which the British soldier is so celebrated, and which, with his firm reliance on his officers, and determined bull-dog courage, render him so irresistible an enemy.

There are no troops who are so little liable to panic — whose *morale*, so to speak, it is so difficult to impair, as our own. Napoleon said they "never knew when they were beaten." And how often has this generous ignorance saved them from defeat! Long may it be ere they learn the humiliating lesson! But that they are not easily disheartened may be gathered from the following anecdote, for the truth of which many a Crimean officer will readily vouch: —

Two days after the disastrous attack of the 18th of June, 1855, a private soldier on fatigue duty was cleaning the door-step in front of Lord Raglan's quarters; but his thoughts were running on far other matters than holystone and whitewash, for on a staff-officer of high rank emerging from the sacred portal, he stopped the astonished functionary with an abrupt request to procure him an immediate interview with the Commander-in-Chief.

"If you please, Colonel," said the man, standing at "attention," and speaking as if it was the most

natural thing in the world, "if it's not too great a liberty, I wants to see the General immediate and particular!"

"Impossible! my good fellow," replied the Colonel — who, like most brave men, was as good-natured as he was fearless — "if you have any complaint to make, tell it me; you may be sure it will reach Lord Raglan, and if it is just, it will be attended to."

"Well, sir, it's not exactly a complaint," replied the soldier, now utterly neglecting the door-step, "but more a request, like; and I wanted to see his lordship special, if so be as it's not contrary to orders."

The Colonel could hardly help laughing at the coolness with which so flagrant a military solecism was urged, but repeated that Lord Raglan was even then engaged with General Pelissier, and that the most he could do for his importunate friend was to receive his message and deliver it to the Commander-in-Chief at a favourable opportunity.

The man reflected an instant, and seemed satisfied, "Well, Colonel," he said, "*we knows you*, and *we trusts you*. I speak for myself and comrades, and what I've got to say to the General is this here. We made a bad business o' Monday, and we knows the reason why. You let *us* alone. There's plenty of us to do it; only you give us leave, and issue an order that not an officer nor a non-commissioned officer is to interfere, and *we*, the private soldiers of the British army, will have that place for you, if we pull the works down with our fingers, and crack the stones with our teeth!"

"And what," said the Colonel, utterly aghast at this unheard-of proposal, "what —"

"What time will we be under arms to do it?" interrupted the delighted delegate, never doubting but that his request was now as good as granted, — "why, at three o'clock to-morrow morning; and you see, Colonel, when the thing's done, if me and my company *wasn't the first lads in!*"

Such is the material of which these troops are made who are now waiting patiently to be marched down to the nightly butchery of the trenches.

"It reminds one of the cover-side at home," remarked Ropsley, as we cantered up to the parade, and dismounted: "one meets fellows from all parts of the camp, and one hears all the news before the sport begins. There goes the French relief," he added, as our allies went slinging by, their jaunty, disordered step, and somewhat straggling line of march, forming as strong a contrast to the measured tramp and regular movements of our own soldiers, as did their blue frock-coats and crimson trousers to the *véritable rouge* for which they had conceived so high a veneration. Ere they have quite disappeared, our own column is formed. The brigade-major on duty has galloped to and fro, and seen to everything with his own eyes. Company officers, in rags and tatters, with swords hung sheathless in worn white belts, and wicker-covered bottles slung in a cord over the hip, to balance the revolver on the other side, — and brave, gentle hearts beating under those tarnished uniforms — and sad experience of death, and danger, and hardship behind those frank faces, and

honest, kindly smiles, — have inspected their men and made their reports, and “fallen in” in their proper places; and the word is given, and its head moves off — “By the left; quick march!” — and the column winds quietly down into the valley of the shadow of death.

Ropsley is field-officer of the night, and I accompany him on his responsible duty, for I would fain see more of the town that has been in all our thoughts for so long, and learn how a siege is urged on so gigantic a scale.

The sun is just setting, and gilds the men’s faces, and the tufts of arid grass above their heads in the deepening ravine, with a tawny orange hue, peculiar to a sunset in the East. The evening is beautifully soft and still, but the dust is suffocating, rising as it does in clouds from the measured tread of so many feet; and there is a feeling of depression, a weight in the atmosphere, such as I have often observed to accompany the close of day on the shores of the Black Sea. Even the men seem to feel its influence — the whispered jest, the ready smile which usually accompanies a march, is wanting; the youngest ensign looks thoughtful, and as if he were brooding on his far-off home; and the lines deepen on many a bearded countenance as we wind lower and lower down the ravine, and reach the first parallel, which to some now present must be so forcible a reminder of disappointed hopes, fruitless sacrifices, and many a true and hearty comrade who shall be friend and comrade no more.

Ropsley has a plan of the works in his hand,

which he studies with eager attention. He hates soldiering — so he avows — yet is he an intelligent and trustworthy officer. With his own ideas on many points at variance with the authorities, and which he never scruples to avow, he yet rigidly carries out every duty entrusted to him, and if the war should last, promises to ascend the ladder as rapidly as any of his comrades. It is not the path he would have chosen to distinction, nor are the privations and discomforts of a soldier's life at all in harmony with his refined perceptions and luxurious habits; but he has embarked on the career, and, true to his principle, he is determined to "make the most of it." I think, too, that I can now perceive in Ropsley a spice of romance foreign to his earlier character. It is a quality without which, in some shape or other, nothing great was ever yet achieved on earth. Yet how angry would he be if he knew that I thought he had a grain of it in his strong practical character, which he flatters himself is the very essence of philosophy and common sense.

As we wind slowly up the now well-trodden covered way of the first parallel, from the shelter of which nothing can be seen of the attack or defence, I am forcibly reminded of the passages in a theatre, which one threads with blindfold confidence, in anticipation of the blaze of light and excitement on which one will presently emerge. Ropsley smiles at the conceit as I whisper it in his ear.

"What odd fancies you have," says he, looking up from the plan on which he has been bending his earnest attention. "Well, you won't have long to

wait for the opera; there's the first bar of the overture already!" As he speaks he pulls me down under the embankment, while a shower of dust and gravel, and a startling explosion immediately in front, warn us that the enemy has thrown a shell into the open angle of the trench, with a precision that is the less remarkable when we reflect how many months he has been practising to attain it.

"Very neatly done," observes Ropsley, rising from his crouching attitude with the greatest coolness; "they seldom trouble one much so soon as this. Probably a compliment to you, Egerton," he adds, laughing. "Now let us see what the damage is?"

Stiff and upright as the ramrod in his firelock, which rattles to his salute, a sergeant of the Guards marches up and makes his report: — "Privates Wood and Jones wounded slightly, sir; Lance-corporal Smithers, killed."

They pass us as they are taken to the rear; the lance-corporal has been shot through the heart, and must have died instantaneously. His face is calm and peaceful, his limbs are disposed on the stretcher as if he slept. Poor fellow! 'Tis quick work, and in ten minutes he is forgotten. My first feeling is one of astonishment at my own hardness of heart in not being more shocked at his fate.

So we reach the advanced trenches without more loss. It is now getting quite dark, for the twilight in these latitudes is but of short duration. A brisk fire seems to be kept up on the works of our allies, responded to by the French gunners with ceaseless

activity; but our own attack is comparatively unmolested, and Ropsley makes his arrangements and plants his sentries in a calm, leisurely way that inspires the youngest soldier with confidence, and wins golden opinions from the veterans who have spent so many bleak and weary nights before Sebastopol.

We are now in the advanced trenches. Not three hundred paces to our front are yawning the deadly batteries of the Redan. The night is dark as pitch. Between the intervals of the cannonade, kept up so vigorously far away on our right, we listen breathlessly as the night-breeze sweeps down to us from the town, until we can almost fancy we hear the Russians talking within their works. But the "pick, pick," of our own men's tools, as they enlarge the trench, and their stifled whispers and cautious tread, deaden all other sounds. Each man works with his firelock in his hand; he knows how soon it may be needed. Yet the soldier's ready jest and quaint conceit is ever on the lip, and many a burst of laughter is smothered as it rises, and enjoyed all the more keenly for the constraint.

"Not so much noise there," says Ropsley, in his quiet, authoritative tone, as the professed buffoon of the light company indulges in a more lively sally than usual; "I'll punish any man that speaks above a whisper. Come, my lads," he adds good-humouredly, "keep quiet now, and perhaps it will be our turn before the night is over!" The men return to their work with a will, and not another word is heard in the ranks.

The officers have established a sort of head-quarters at a *place d'armes*, or re-assembling spot near the centre of their own "attack." Three or four are coiled up in different attitudes, beguiling the long dark hours with whispered jests and grave speculations as to the intentions of the enemy. Here a stalwart captain of Highlanders stretches his huge frame across the path, puffing forth volumes of smoke from the short black pipe that has accompanied him through the whole war — the much-prized "cutty" that was presented to him by his father's forester when he shot the royal stag in the "pass abane Craig-Owar;" there a slim and dandy rifleman passes a wicker-covered flask of brandy-and-water to a tall sedate personage who has worked his way through half-a-dozen Indian actions to be senior captain of a line regiment, and who, should he be fortunate enough to survive the present siege, may possibly arrive at the distinguished rank of a Brevet-Major. He prefers his own bottle of cold tea; as it gurgles into his lips the Highlander pulls a face of disgust.

"Take those long, indecent legs of yours out of the way, Sandy," says a merry voice, the owner of which, stumbling over these brawny limbs in the darkness, makes his way up to Ropsley, and whispers a few words in his ear which seem to afford our colonel much satisfaction.

"You couldn't have done it better," says he to the new arrival, a young officer of engineers, the "bravest of the brave," and "the gayest of the gay;" "I could have spared you a few more men, but it is

better as it is. I hate harassing our fellows, if we can help it. What will you have to drink?"

"A drain at the flask, first, colonel," answers the light-hearted soldier; "I've been on duty now, one way and another, for eight-and-forty hours, and I'm about beat. Sandy, my boy, give us a whiff out of 'the cutty.' I'll sit by you. You remind me of an opera-dancer, in that dress. Mind, you dine with me to-morrow, if you're not killed."

The Highlander growls out a gruff affirmative. He delights in his volatile friend; but he is a man of few words, although his arm is weighty and his brain is clear.

A shell shrieks and whistles over our heads. We mark it revolving, bright and beautiful, like a firework through the darkness. It lights far away to our rear, and bounds once more from the earth ere it explodes with a loud report.

"Not much mischief done by that gentleman," observes Ropsley, taking his cigar from his mouth; "he must have landed clear of all our people. We shall soon have another from the same battery. I wish I knew what they are doing over yonder," he adds, pointing significantly in the direction of the Redan.

"I think I can find out for you, Colonel," says the engineer; "I am going forward to the last 'sap,' and I shall not be very far from them there. Your sharp-shooters are just at the corner, Green," he adds to the rifleman, "wont you come with me?" The latter consents willingly; and as they rise from their dusty lair I ask leave to accompany them, for my

curiosity is fearfully excited, and I am painfully anxious to know what the enemy is about. The last "cap" is a narrow and shallow trench, the termination of which is but a short distance from the Russian work. It is discontinued at the precipitous declivity which here forms one side of the well-known Woronzoff ravine; and from this spot, dark as it is, the sentry can be discerned moving to and fro — a dusky, indistinct figure — above the parapet of the Redan.

The engineer officer and Green of the Rifles seat themselves on the very edge of the ravine; the former plucks a blade or two of grass, and flings them into the air.

"They can't hear us with this wind," says he. "What say you, Green; wouldn't it be a good lark to creep in under there, and make out what they're doing?"

"I'm game!" says Green, one of those dare-devil young gentlemen to be found amongst the subalterns of the British army, who would make the same reply were it a question of crossing that glacis in the full glare of day to take the work by assault, single-handed. "Put your sword off, that's all, otherwise you'll make such a row that our own fellows will think they're attacked, and fire on us like blazes. Mind you, my chaps have had lots of practice, and can hit a haystack as well as their neighbours. Now then, are you ready? Come on."

The engineer laughed, and unbuckled his sabre.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Egerton, in case I shouldn't see you again," said he; and so the two crept

silently away upon their somewhat hazardous expedition.

I watched their dark figures with breathless interest. The sky had lifted a little, and there was a ray or two of moonlight struggling fitfully through the clouds. I could just distinguish the two English officers as they crawled on hands and knees amongst the slabs of rock and inequalities of ground which now formed their only safety. I shuddered to think that if I could thus distinguish their forms, why not the Russian riflemen? — and what chance for them then, with twenty or thirty "Miniés" sighted on them at point-blank distance? However, "Fortune favours the brave;" the light breeze died away, and the moon was again obscured. I could see them no longer, and I knew that by this time they must have got within a very few paces of the enemy's batteries, and that discovery was now certain death. The ground, too, immediately under the Russian work was smoother and less favourable to concealment than under our own. The moments seemed to pass very slowly, I scarcely dared to move, and the tension of my nerves was absolutely painful, every faculty seeming absorbed in the one concentrated effort of listening.

Suddenly a short, sharp stream of light, followed by the quick, angry report of the Minié — then another and another — they illumine the night for an instant; and during that instant I strain my eyes in vain to discover the two dark creeping forms. And now a blinding glare fills our own trenches — the figures of the men coming out like phantoms in their

different attitudes of labour and repose. The enemy has thrown a fire-ball into our works to ascertain what we are about. Like the pilot fish before the shark, that brilliant messenger is soon succeeded by its deadly followers, and ere I can hurry back to the rallying point of the attack, where I have left Ropsley and his comrades, a couple of shells have already burst amongst our soldiers, dealing around them their quantum of wounds and death, whilst a couple more are winging their way like meteors over our heads, to carry the alarm far to the rear, where the gallant blue-jackets have established a tremendous battery, and are at this moment in all probability chafing and fretting that they are not nearer the point of danger.

"Stand to your arms! Steady, men, steady!" is the word passed from soldier to soldier along the ranks, and the men spring like lions to the parapet, every heart beating high with courage; every firelock held firmly at the charge. They are tired of "long bowls" now, and would fain have it out with the bayonet.

The fire from the Redan lights up the intervening glacis, and as I rush hurriedly along the trench, stooping my head with instinctive precaution, I steal a glance or two over the low parapet, which shows me the figure of a man running as hard as his legs can carry him towards our own rallying point. He is a mark for fifty Russian rifles, but he speeds on nevertheless. His cheery voice rings through all the noise and confusion, as he holloas to our men not to fire at him.

"Hold on, my lads," he says, leaping breathlessly into the trench; "I've had a precious good run for it. Where's the Colonel?"

His report is soon made. It is the young officer of engineers who thus returns in haste from his reconnoitring expedition. His companion, Green, has reached his own regiment by another track, for they wisely separated when they found themselves observed, and, strange to say, notwithstanding the deadly fire through which they have "run the gauntlet," both are unwounded. The engineer confers with Ropsley in a low voice.

"They only want to draw off our attention, Colonel," says he; "I am quite sure of it. When I was under the Redan I could hear large bodies of men moving towards their left. That is the point of attack, depend upon it. There they go on our right! I told you so. Now we shall have it, hot and heavy, or I'm mistaken."

Even while he speaks a brisk fire is heard to open on our right flank. The clouds clear off, too, and the moon, now high in the heavens, shines forth unveiled. By her soft light we can just discern a dark, indistinct mass winding slowly along across an open space of ground between the Russian works. The rush of a round shot from one of our own batteries whizzes over our heads. That dusky column wavers, separates, comes together again, and presses on. Ropsley gets cooler and cooler, for it is coming at last.

"Captain McDougal," says he to that brawny warrior, who does not look the least like an opera-

dancer now, as he rears his six feet of vigour on those stalwart supporters, "I can spare all the Highlanders; form them directly, and move to your right flank. Do not halt till you reach the ground I told you of. The Rifles and our own Light Company will stand fast! Remainder, right, form four deep — march!"

There is an alarm along the whole line. Our allies are engaged in a brisk cannonade for their share, and many an ugly missile hisses past our ears from the foe, or whistles over our heads from our own supports. Is it to be a general attack? — a second Inkermann, fought out by moonlight? Who knows? The uncertainty is harassing, yet attended with its own thrilling excitement — half a pleasure, half a pain.

A few of our own people (we cannot in the failing light discover to what regiment they belong) are giving way before a dense mass of Russian infantry that out-number them a hundred to one. They have shown a determined front for a time, but they are sorely pressed and overpowered, and by degrees they give back more and more. The truth must out — they are on the point of turning tail and running away. A little fiery Irishman stands out in front of them; a simple private is he in the regiment, and never likely to reach a more exalted rank, for, like all great men, he has a darling weakness, and the temptation to which he cannot but succumb is inebriety — the pages of the Defaulters' Book call it "habitual drunkenness." Nevertheless, he has the heart of a hero. Gesticulating

furiously, and swearing, I regret to say, with blasphemous volubility, he tears the coat from his back, flings his cap on the ground, and tossing his arms wildly above his head, thus rebukes, like some Homeric hero, his more prudent comrades —

“Och, bad luck to ye, rank cowards and shufflers that ye are! and bad luck to the day I ’listed! and bad luck to the rig’ment that’s disgracin’ me! Would I wear the uniform, and parade like a soldier again, when it’s been dirtied by the likes of you? ’Faith, not I, ye thunderin’ villains. I’ll tread and I’ll trample the coat, and the cap, and the facin’s, and the rest of it; and I’ll fight in my shirt, so I will, if they come on fifty to one. Hurroo!”

Off goes his musket in the very faces of the enemy; with a rush and a yell he runs at them with the bayonet. His comrades turn, and strike in vigorously with the hero. Even that little handful of men serves for an instant to check the onward progress of the Russians. By this time the supports — Guards, Highlanders, and the flower of the British infantry — are pouring from their entrenchments; a tremendous fire of musketry opens from the whole line; staff officers are galloping down hurry-skurry from the camp. Far away above us, on those dark heights, the whole army will be under arms in ten minutes. The Russian column wavers once more — breaks like some wave against a sunken rock; dark flitting figures are seen to come out, and stagger, and fall; and then the whole body goes to the right-about and returns within its defences, just as a mass of heavy clouds rising from

the Black Sea sweeps across the moon, and darkness covers once more besiegers and besieged.

We may lie down in peace now till the first blush of dawn rouses the riflemen on each side to that sharp-shooting practice of which it is their custom to take at least a couple of hours before breakfast. We may choose the softest spots in those dusty covered ways, and lean our backs against gabions that are getting sadly worn out, and in their half-emptied inefficiency afford but an insecure protection even from the conical ball of the wicked "Minié." We may finish our flasks of brandy-and-water and our bottles of cold tea, and get a few winks of sleep, and dream of home and the loved ones that, except in the hours of sleep, some of us will never see more. All these luxuries we may enjoy undisturbed. We shall not be attacked again, for this is what the soldiers term "A *quiet* night in the trenches."

CHAPTER XI.

The Grotto.

It is not *all* fighting, though, before Sebastopol. Without coinciding entirely with the somewhat Sancho Panza-like philosophy which affirms that the "latter end of a feast is better than the beginning of a fray," there is many a gallant fellow who has not the slightest objection to take his share of both; and from the days of Homer's heavy-handed heroes, down to those of the doughty Major Dugald Dalgetty himself, a good commissariat has always been considered essential to the success of all warlike enterprise. Every campaigner knows what a subject of speculation and excitement is afforded by the prospect of "what he will have for dinner," and the scantiness of that meal, together with the difficulty of providing for it, seems but to add to the zest with which it is enjoyed. Many a quaint incident and laughable anecdote is related of the foraging propensities of our allies, particularly the Zouaves, who had learned their trade in Algeria, and profited by the lessons of their Khabyle foe. The Frenchman, moreover, knows how to *cook* a dinner *when* he has filched it, which is more than can be said for our own gallant countrymen.

Had it not been for Fortnum and Mason — names which deserve to be immortalized, and which

will ever be remembered with gratitude by the British army — our heroes would indeed have been badly off for luxurious living on that bracing and appetite-giving *plateau*. Yet, thanks to the energy of this enterprising firm, Amphytrions were enabled to indulge their taste for hospitality, and guests to admire and criticise the merits of the very commendable delicacies placed before them.

A dinner-party at Sebastopol, just out of cannon-shot, had something inexpressibly enlivening in its composition. There was no lack of news, no lack of laughter, no lack of eatables and drinkables, above all, no lack of hunger and thirst. The same faces were to be seen around the board that might have been met with at any dinner-table in London, but white neckcloths and broadcloth had given place to tawny beards and tarnished uniforms, whilst the bronzed countenances and high spirits of the party formed an exhilarating contrast to the weary looks and vapid conversation which make London society, in its own intrinsic attractions, the stupidest in the world.

The sun's last rays are lighting up that well-known hill where sleeps "the bravest of the brave," he whose name will go down to our children's children coupled with Inkermann, as that of Leonidas with Thermopylæ. He whose fall evoked a deed of chivalry such as minstrel and troubadour snatched from oblivion in the olden time, and handed down to us for a beacon along the pathway of honour. Had they ever a nobler theme than this? A chief falls, surrounded and overpowered, in his desperate

attempt to retrieve the fortunes of a day that he deems all but lost. His friend and comrade, faint and mangled, turns once more into the battle, and bestrides the form of the prostrate hero. One to ten, the breathless and the wounded against the fresh and strong, but the heart of an English gentleman behind that failing sword, beat down and shattered by the thirsty bayonets. An instant the advance is checked. An instant and they might both have been saved. Oh, for but one half-dozen of the towering forms that are even now mustering to the rescue! They are coming through the smoke! Too late — too late! the lion-hearted chieftain and the gentle, chivalrous warrior are down, slain, trampled, and defaced, but side by side on the bed of honour; and though the tide sweeps back, and the broken columns of the Muscovite are driven, routed and shattered, to the rear, *their* ears are deaf to the shout of victory, *their* laurel wreaths shall hang vacant and unworn, for they shall rise to claim them no more.

The setting sun is gilding their graves — the white buildings of Sebastopol smile peacefully in his declining rays — the sea is blushing violet under the rich purple of the evening sky. The Allied fleets are dotted like sleeping wild-fowl over the bosom of the deep; one solitary steamer leaves its long dusky track of smoke to form a stationary cloud, so smooth is the water that the ripple caused by the sunken ships can be plainly discerned in the harbour, and the Russian men-of-war still afloat look like children's toys in the distance of that clear, calm atmosphere. The bleak and arid foreground, denuded of vegeta-

tion, and trampled by a thousand footmarks, yet glows with the warm orange hues of sunset, and the white tents contrast pleasingly with here and there the richer colouring of some more stationary hut or storehouse. It is an evening for peace, reflection, and repose; but the dull report of a 68-pounder smites heavily on the ear from the town, and a smart soldier-servant, standing respectfully at "attention," observes "The General is ready, sir, and dinner is upon the table."

In a grotto dug by some Tartar hermit out of the cool earth are assembled a party of choice spirits, who are indeed anchorites in nothing but the delight with which they greet the refreshing atmosphere of their banqueting-hall. A flight of stone steps leads down into this well-contrived vault, in so hot a climate no contemptible exchange for the stifling interior of a tent, or even the comparative comfort of a wooden hut thoroughly baked through by the sun. A halting figure on crutches is toiling painfully down that staircase, assisted, with many a jest at their joint deficiencies, by a stalwart, handsome Guardsman, a model of manly strength and symmetry, but lacking what he is pleased to term his "liver wing." They are neither of them likely to forget the Crimea whilst they live. Ere they reach the bottom they are overtaken by a cavalry officer with jingling spurs and noisy scabbard, who, having had a taste of fighting, such as ought to have satisfied most men, at Balaclava, is now perpetually hovering about the front, disgusted with his enforced idleness at Kadikoi, and with a strong impression on

his mind — which he supports by many weighty arguments — that a few squadrons of Dragoons would be valuable auxiliaries to a storming party, and that a good swordsman on a good horse can “go anywhere and do anything.”

“I think we are all here, now,” says the host; “Monsieur le Général, shall we go to dinner?”

“The individual addressed gives a hearty affirmative. He is a stout, good-humoured looking personage, with an eagle eye, and an extremely tight uniform covered with orders and decorations. He is not yet too fat to get on horseback, though the privations of campaigning seem to increase his rotundity day by day, and he expects ere long to go to battle, like an ancient Scythian, in his war-chariot. By that time he will be a marshal of France, but meanwhile he pines a little for the opera, and enjoys his dinner extremely. He occupies the seat of honour on the right hand of his host. The latter bids his guests welcome in frank, soldierlike style; and whilst the soup is handed round, and those bearded lips are occupied with its merits, let us take a look round the table at the dozen or so of guests, some of whom are destined ere long to have their likenesses in every print-shop in merry England. First of all the dinner-giver himself — a square, middle-sized man, with a kindling eye, and a full determined voice that suggests at once the habit of command — a kindly though energetic manner, and a countenance indicative of great resolution and clear-headedness; perhaps the best drill in the British army, and delighting much in a neat touch of parade tactics even

before an enemy. Many a Guardsman nudged his comrade with a grin of humorous delight when, on a certain 20th of September, his old colonel coolly doubled a flank company in upon the rear of its battalion, and smiled to see the ground it would otherwise have occupied ploughed and riddled by the round shot that was pouring from the enemy's batteries in position on the heights above the Alma. The British soldier likes coolness above all things; and where in command of foreign troops an officer should rave and gesticulate and tear his hair to elicit a corresponding enthusiasm from his men, our own phlegmatic Anglo-Saxons prefer the quiet smile and the good-humoured "*Now, my lads!*" which means so much.

On the left, and facing the Frenchman, sits a middle-aged decided looking man, somewhat thoughtful and abstracted, yet giving his opinions in a clear and concise manner, and with a forcible tone and articulation that denote great energy and firmness of character. His name, too, is destined to fill the page of history — his future is bright and glowing before him, and none will grudge his honours and promotion, for he is endeared to the army by many a kindly action, and it has been exertion for their welfare and watching on their behalf, that have wasted his strong frame with fever, and turned his hair so grey in so short a time. Soldier as he is to his heart's core, he would fain be outside in the sunset with his colours and his sketch-book, arresting on its pages the glorious panorama which is even now passing away; but he is listening attentively to his neighbour, a

handsome young man in the uniform of a simple private of Zouaves, and is earnestly occupied in "getting a wrinkle," as it is termed, concerning the interior economy and discipline of that far-famed corps. The Zouave gives him all the information he can desire with that peculiarly frank and fascinating manner which is fast dying out with the *ancien régime*, for though a private of Zouaves he is a marquis of France, the representative of one of the oldest families in the Empire, and a worthy scion of his chivalrous race. Rather than not draw the sword for his country, he has resigned his commission in that body of household cavalry termed "The Guides," and entered as a trooper in the Chasseurs d'Afrique: a display of martial enthusiasm for which he has been called out from the ranks of his original corps and publicly complimented by the Empress Eugénie herself. Arrived in the Crimea, he found his new comrades paced in enforced idleness at far too great a distance from active operations to suit his taste, and he forthwith exchanged once more into the Zouaves, with whom he took his regular share of duty in the trenches, and he is now enjoying a furlough of some six hours from his quarters, to dine with an English general, and cultivate the *entente cordiale* which flourishes so vigorously on this Crimean soil. Alas for the gallant spirit, the graceful form, the warm noble heart! no bird of ill omen flew across his path as he came to-day to dinner, no warning-note of impending death rang in his ears to give him notice of his doom. To-night he is as gay, as lively, as cheerful as usual; to-morrow he will be but

a form of senseless clay, shot through the head in the trenches.

Meanwhile the champagne goes round, and is none the less appreciated that although there is an abundance of bottles, there is a sad deficiency of glasses. A light-hearted aide-de-camp, well-accustomed to every emergency, great or small, darts off to his adjoining tent, from which he presently returns, bearing two tin cups and the broken remains of a coffee-pot; with these auxiliaries dinner progresses merrily, and a fat turkey — how obtained it is needless to inquire — is soon reduced to a skeleton. A little wit goes a long way when men are before an enemy; and as the aide-de-camp strongly repudiates the accusation of having purloined this hapless bird, jokes are bandied about from one to another, every one wishing to fasten on his neighbour the accusation of knowing how to “make war support war.”

The English officers are a long way behind their allies in this useful accomplishment; and the French general shakes his jolly sides as he relates with much gusto sundry Algerian experiences of what we should term larceny and rapine, but which his more liberal ideas seem to consider excusable, if not positively meritorious.

“The best foragers I had in Algeria,” says he, “were my best soldiers too. If I wanted fresh milk for my coffee, I trusted to the samemen that formed my storming parties, and I was never disappointed in one case or the other. In effect, they were droll fellows, my Zouaves Indigènes — cunning too, as

the cat that steals cream; the Khabyles could keep nothing from them. If we entered their tents, everything of value was taken away before you could look round. To be sure we could carry nothing with us, but that made no difference. I have seen the men wind shawls round their waists that were worth a hundred louis a-piece, and throw them aside on a hot day on the march. There was one Khabyle chief who was very conspicuous for the magnificent scarlet cashmere which he wore as a turban. On foot or on horseback, there he was, always fighting and always in the front. Heaven knows why, but the men called him Bobouton, and wherever there was a skirmish Bobouton was sure to be in the thick of it. One day I happened to remark 'that I was tired of Bobouton and his red shawl, and I wished some one would bring me the turban and rid me of the wearer.' A little swarthy Zouave, named P  p  , overheard my observation. '*Mon Colonel*,' said he, with a most ceremonious bow, 'to-morrow is your *jour de f  te* — will you permit me to celebrate it by presenting you with the scarlet turban of Bobouton?' I laughed, thanked him, and thought no more about it.

"The following morning, at sunrise, I rode out to make a reconnaissance. A party, of whom P  p   was one, moved forward to clear the ground. Contrary to all discipline and *ordonnance*, my droll little friend had mounted a magnificent pair of epaulettes. Worn on his Zouave uniform, the effect was the least thing ridiculous. As I knew of no epaulettes in the camp besides my own, I confess I was rather angry,

but the enemy having opened a sharp fire upon my skirmishers, I did not choose to sacrifice an aide-de-camp by bidding him ride on and visit P  p   with condign punishment; so reserving to myself that duty on his return, I watched him meanwhile through my glass with an interest proportioned to my regard for my epaulettes, an article not too easily replaced in Algeria. Nor were mine the only eyes that looked so eagerly on the flashing bullion. Bobouton soon made his appearance from behind a rock, and by the manner in which he and P  p   watched and, so to speak, "stalked" each other, I saw that a regular duel was pending between the two. In fine, after very many man  uvres on both sides, the Zouave incautiously exposed himself at a distance of eighty or ninety paces, and was instantaneously covered by his watchful enemy. As the smoke cleared away from the Khabyle's rifle, poor P  p   sprang convulsively in the air, and fell headlong on his face. "*Tenez!*" said I to myself, "there is P  p   shot through the heart, and I shall never see my epaulettes again."

"The Khabyle rushed from his hidingplace to strip his fallen antagonist. Already his eyes glittered with delight at the idea of possessing those tempting ornaments — already he was within a few feet of the prostrate body, when, "*crack!*" once more I heard the sharp report of a rifle, and presto, like some scene at a carnival, it was Bobouton that lay slain upon the rocks, and P  p   that stood over him and stripped him of the spoils of war. In another minute he unrolled the red turban at my

horse's feet. '*Mon Colonel*,' said he, 'accept my congratulations for yourself and your amiable family. Accept also this trifling token of remembrance taken from that incautious individual who, like the mouse in the fable, thinks the cat must be dead because she lies prostrate without moving. And accept, moreover, my thanks for the loan of these handsome ornaments, without the aid of which I could not have procured myself the pleasure of presenting my worthy colonel with the shawl of *ce malheureux Bobouton*.' The rascal had stolen them out of my tent the night before, though my aide-de-camp slept within two paces of me, and my head rested on the very box in which they were contained."

"Alas! we have no experiences like yours, General," says a tall, handsome colonel of infantry, with the Cape and Crimean ribbons on his breast; "wherever we have made war with savages, they have had nothing worth taking. A Kaffre chief goes to battle with very little on besides his skin, and that is indeed scarce worth the trouble of stripping. When we captured Sandilli, I give you my word he had no earthly article upon his person but a string of blue beads, and yet he fought like a wild-cat to make his escape."

"Your health, my friend," replies the General, clinking his glass with that of his new acquaintance. "You have been in Caffraria? Ah! I should have known it by your decorations. Are they not a fierce and formidable enemy? Is it not a good school for war? Tell me, now" — looking round the table

for an explanation — “why do you not reserve South Africa, you others, as we do the northern shore, to make of it a drill-ground for your soldiers and a school for your officers? It would cost but little — a few hundred men a year would be the only loss. Bah! — a mere trifle to the richest and most populous country in the world. I do not understand your English *sang froid*. Why do you not establish your Algeria at the Cape?”

Many voices are immediately raised in explanation; but it is difficult to make the thorough soldier — the man who has all his life been the military servant of a military Government — understand how repugnant would be such a proceeding to the feelings of the British people — how contrary to the whole spirit of their constitution. At length, with another glass of champagne, a new light seems to break in upon him. “Ah!” says he, “it would not be approved of by *Le Times*; now I understand perfectly. We manage these matters better with us. *Peste!* if we go to war, there it is. We employ our *Gazettes* to celebrate our victories. Your health, *mon Général*; this is indeed a wearisome business in which we are engaged — a life totally brutalizing. Without change, without manœuvring, and without pleasure: what would you? I trust the next campaign in which we shall meet may be in a civilized country — the borders of the Rhine, for instance; what think you? — where, instead of this barbarian desert, you find a village every mile, and a good house in every village, with a bottle of wine in the cellar, a smoked ham in the chimney, and a handsome Saxon *blonde*

in the kitchen. '*A la guerre, comme à la guerre, n'est-ce pas, mon Général?*'"

The company are getting merry and talkative; cigars are lit, and coffee is handed round; the small hours are approaching, and what Falstaff calls the "sweet of the night" is coming on, when the tramp and snort of a horse are heard at the entrance of the grotto, — a steel scabbard rings upon the stone steps, — and although the new-comer's place at one end of the table has been vacant the whole of dinner-time, he does not sit down to eat till he has whispered a few words in the ear of the English general who receives the intelligence with as much coolness as it is imparted.

In five minutes the grotto is cleared of all save its customary occupants. The French general has galloped off to his head-quarters; the English officers are hurrying to their men; each as he leaves the grotto casts a look at an ingenious arrangement at its mouth, which, by means of a diagram formed of white shells, each line pointing to a particular portion of the attack, enables the observer to ascertain at once in which direction the fire is most severe. The originator of this simple and ingenious indicator meanwhile sits down for a mouthful of food. He has brought the intelligence of the sortie already described, and which will turn out the troops of all arms in about ten minutes; but in the mean time he has five to spare, and, being very hungry, he makes the best use of his time. As the light from the solitary lamp brings into relief that square, powerful form — that statue-like head, with its fearless beauty

and its classical features — above all, the frank, kindly smile, that never fades under difficulties, and the clear, unwavering eye that never quails in danger, — any physiognomist worthy of the name would declare “that man was born to be a hero!” And the physiognomist would not be mistaken.

CHAPTER XII.

The Redan.

THE days dragged on in the camp. Sometimes wearily enough, sometimes enlivened by a party of pleasure to Baidar, an expedition to the monastery of St. George, a general action at the Tchernaya, a hurdle-race at Kadikoi, or some trifling excitement of the same kind. Already the great heat was beginning to be tempered by the bracing air of autumn, and the army was more than half inclined to speculate on the possibility of another long dreary winter before Sebastopol.

But the time had come at last. The blow so long withheld was to be launched in earnest, and for a day or two before the final and successful assault, men's minds seemed to tell them — they scarce knew why — that a great change was impending, and that every night might now be the last on which the dogged valour of the besieged would man those formidable defences that, under the names of the Malakhoff, the Redan, &c., had for so long occupied the attention of France, England, and indeed the whole of Europe.

I was sitting outside Ropsley's tent, sharing my breakfast of hard biscuit with Bold, at daybreak of a fine September morning. The old dog seemed on this occasion to have renewed his youth, and was so

demonstrative and affectionate as to call down a strong reproof from Ropsley, with whom he was never on very friendly terms, for laying his broad paw on the well-brushed uniform of the colonel. "Tie the brute up, Vere," said he, carefully removing the dirt from his threadbare sleeve, "or he will follow us on parade. Are you ready? if so, come along. I would not be late to-day of all days, for a thousand a year."

I remained in its rear, as he completed the inspection of his company. I had never seen the men so brisk or so smartly turned out, and there was an exhilarated yet earnest look on their countenances that denoted their own opinion of the coming day. Ropsley himself was more of the *bon camarade*, and less of the "fine gentleman" than usual. As we marched down to the trenches side by side, he talked freely of old times, — our school days at Everdon, our later meeting at Beverley, and, by a natural transition, turned the subject of conversation to Victor de Rohan, and his sister Valérie. I had never known him allude to the latter of his own accord before. He seemed to have something on his mind which pride or mistrust, or both, would not permit him to bring out. At last, apparently with a strong effort, he whispered hurriedly,

"Vere, I've a favour to ask you — if I should be *hit* to-day by chance, and badly, you know, I should like you to write and remember me to the De Rohans, and — and — particularly to Countess Valérie. If ever you should see her again, you might tell her so."

I pressed his hand in answer, and I thought his voice was hoarser as he resumed,

"Vere, it is not often I confess myself wrong, but I have wronged you fearfully. If I'm alive to-morrow I'll tell you all; if not, Vere, can you — *can* you forgive me?"

"From my heart," was all I had time to reply, for at that instant up rode the leader of the assault, and Ropsley's voice was calm and measured, his manner cold and cynical as ever, while he answered the short and military catechism usual on such occasions.

"Then it's all right," was the remark of the mounted officer, in as good-humoured and jovial a tone as if the affair in hand were a mere question of one of his own Norfolk *battues*; "and what a fine morning we've got for the business," he added, dismounting, and patting his good horse as it was led away, ere he turned round to put himself at the head of the storming party.

I watched him as one watches a man whose experiences of danger have given him a fascination perfectly irresistible to inferior minds. It was the same officer whom I have already mentioned as the latest arrival to disturb the dinner party in the Grotto, but to-day he looked, if possible, more cheerful, and in better spirits than his wont. I thought of his antecedents, as they had often been related to me by one of his oldest friends, — of his unfailing good humour and kindliness of disposition — of his popularity in his regiment — of his skill and prowess at all sports and pastimes, with the gloves, the foils,

the sharp-rowelled spurs of the hunting-field, or the velvet cap that fails to protect the steeplechaser from a broken neck — of his wanderings in the desert amongst the Bedouin Arabs, and his cold bivouacs on the *prairie* with the Red Indians — of his lonely ride after the Alma, when, steering by the stars through a country with which he was totally unacquainted, he arrived at the fleet with the news of the famous flank march to Balaclava — of his daring *sang froid* when “the thickest of war’s tempest lowered” at Inkermann, and of the daily dangers and privations of the weary siege, always borne and faced out with the same merry lighthearted smile; and now he was to *lead the assault*.

None but a soldier knows all that is comprised in those three simple words — the coolness, the daring, the lightning glance, the ready resource, the wary tactics, and the headlong gallantry which must all be combined successfully to fill that post of honour; and then to think that the odds are ten to one he never comes back alive!

As I looked at this athletic frame and handsome, manly face, as I returned his cordial, off-hand greeting, as courteous to the nameless Interpreter as it would have been to General Pelissier himself, my heart tightened to think of what might — nay, what *must* surely happen on that fire-swept glacis, unless he bore indeed a life charmed with immunity from shot and steel.

Man by man he inspected the Forlorn Hope, — their arms, their ammunition pouches, their scaling-ladders, all the tackle and paraphernalia of death.

For each he had a word of encouragement, a jest, or a smile. Ropsley and his company were to remain in support in the advanced trenches. All was at length reported "ready," and then came the awful hush that ever ushers in the most desperate deeds — the minutes of pale and breathless suspense, that fly so quickly and yet seem to pass like lead — when the boldest cheek is blanched, and the stoutest heart beats painfully, and the change to action and real peril is felt to be an unspeakable relief to all.

A cold wet nose was poked into my hand. Bold had tracked me from the camp, and had followed me even here; nothing would induce him now to quit my side, for even the dog seemed to think something awful was impending, and watched with red, angry eyes and lowered tail and bristling neck, as if he too had been "told off" for the attack.

A roar of artillery shakes the air; our allies have opened their fire on the Malakhoff, and their columns are swarming like bees to the assault. Battalion after battalion, regiment after regiment, come surging through the ditch, to break like waves on the sea-shore, as the depressed guns of the enemy hew awful gaps in their ranks — to break indeed but to re-form, and as fresh supports keep pressing them on from the rear, to dash upwards against the earth-work, and to overflow and fling themselves from the parapet in the face of the Russian gunners below.

The Muscovite fights doggedly, and without dream of surrender or retreat. Hand to hand the conflict must be decided with the bayonet, and the little Zouaves shout, and yell, and stab, and press

onward, and revel, so to speak, in the wild orgy of battle.

But the Northman is a grim, uncompromising foe, and more than once the "red pantaloons" waver and give back, and rally, and press on again to death. Instances of gallantry and self-devotion are rife amongst the officers. Here, a young captain of infantry flings himself alone upon the bayonets of the enemy, and falls pierced with a hundred wounds; there, an old white-headed colonel, *décoré* up to his chin, draws an ominous revolver, and threatens to shoot any one of his own men through the head that shows the slightest disinclination to rush on. "*Ma foi*," says he, "*c'est pour encourager les autres!*" The southern blood boils up under the influence of example, and if French troops are once a little flushed with success, their *élan*, as they call that quality for which we have no corresponding expression, is irresistible. The Russians cannot face the impetuosity of their charge; already many of the guns are spiked, and the gunners bayoneted; the grey-coated columns are yielding ground foot by foot; fresh troops pour in over the parapet, for the living are now able to pass unscathed over the dead, with whom the ditch is filled. The fire of the Russians is slackening, and their yell dies away fainter on the breeze. A French cheer, wild, joyous, and unearthly, fills the air, — it thrills in the ears of Pelissier, sitting immovable on his horse at no great distance from the conflict; his telescope is pressed to his eye, and he is watching eagerly for the well-known signal. And now he sees it! A gleam of

fierce joy lights up his features, and as the tricolor of France is run up to the crest of the Malakhoff, he shuts his glass with a snap, dismounts from his horse, and rolling himself round in his cloak, lies down for a few minutes' repose, and observes, with a zest of which none but a Frenchman is capable, "*Tenez! voilà mon bâton de Maréchal!*"

His are not the only eyes eagerly watching the progress of the attack; many a veteran of both armies is busied recalling all his own experiences and all his knowledge of warfare, to calculate the probabilities of their success whose task it is to cross that wide and deadly *glacis* which is swept by the batteries of the Redan.

The men are formed for the assault, and the word is given to advance.

"Now, my lads," says the leader, "keep cool — keep steady — and keep together — we'll do it handsomely when we're about it. Forward!"

It is related of him whom Napoleon called "the bravest of the brave," the famous Ney, that he was the only officer of that day who could preserve his *sang-froid* totally unmoved when standing with *his back* to a heavy fire. Many a gallant fellow facing the enemy would pay no more regard to the missiles whistling about his ears, than to the hail-stones of an April shower; but it was quite a different sensation to *front* his own advancing troops, and never look round at the grim archer whose every shaft might be the last. What the French Marshal, however, piqued himself upon as the acme of personal courage and conduct, our English leader seems to

consider a mere matter-of-course in the performance of an every-day duty. Step by step, calm, collected, and good-humoured, he regulates the movements of the attacking force. Fronting their ranks as if he were on parade, he brings them out of their sheltering defences into the iron storm, now pouring forth its deadly wrath upon that rocky *plateau* which *must* be crossed in defiance of everything.

"Steady, men," he observes once more, as he forms them for the desperate effort; "we'll have them *out of that* in ten minutes. Now, my lads! Forward, and follow me!"

The cocked hat is waving amongst the smoke — the daring colonel is forward under the very guns — With a British cheer, the Forlorn Hope dash eagerly on, comrade encouraging comrade, side by side, shoulder to shoulder — hearts throbbing wild and high, and a grip of iron on good "brown Bess." Men live a lifetime in a few such moments. There are two brothers in that doomed band who have not met for years — they quarrelled in their hot youth over their father's grave, about the quiet orchard and the peaceful homestead that each has since longed so painfully to see once more; and now they have served, with half the globe between them, and each believes the other to have forgotten him, and the orchard and the homestead have passed away from their name for ever. They would weep and be friends if they could meet again. There are but four men between them at this moment, and two are down, stark and dead, and two are dragging their mangled bodies slowly to the rear, and the brothers

are face to face under the fatal batteries of the Redan.

"Is't thou, my lad?" is all the greeting that passes in that wild moment; but the blackened hands meet with a convulsive clasp, and they are brothers once more, as when, long ago, they hid their sturdy little faces in their mother's gown. Thank God for that! In another minute it would have been too late, for Bill is down, shot through the lungs, his white belts limp and crimson with blood; and John, with a tear in his eye, and something betwixt an oath and a prayer upon his lips, is rushing madly on, for the cocked hat is still waving forward amongst the smoke, and the colonel is still cheering them after him into the jaws of death.

But soldiers, even British soldiers, are but men, and the fire grows so deadly that the attacking force cannot but be checked in its headlong charge. The line breaks — wavers — gives way — the awful *glacis* is strewn with dead and dying — groans and curses, and shrieks for "*water! water!*" mingle painfully with the wild cheers, and the trampling feet, and the thunder of the guns; but volumes of smoke, curling low and white over the ground, veil half the horrors of that ghastly scene; yet through the smoke can be discerned some three or four figures under the very parapet of the Redan, and the cocked hat and square frame of the colonel are conspicuous amongst the group.

It must have been a strange sight for the few actors that reached it alive. A handful of men, an officer or two, a retiring enemy, a place half taken,

and an eager longing for reinforcements to complete the victory.

An aide-de-camp is despatched to the rear, he starts upon his mission to traverse that long three hundred yards, swept by a deadly cross-fire, that blackens and scorches the very turf beneath his feet. Down he goes headlong, shot through the body ere he has "run the gauntlet" for a third of the way. Another, and another share the same fate! What is to be done? The case is urgent, yet doubtful; it demands promptitude, yet requires consideration. Our colonel is a man who never hesitates or wavers for an instant. He calls up a young officer of the Line, one of the few survivors on the spot; even as he addresses him, the rifleman on his right lurches heavily against him, shot through the loins, and a red-coated comrade on his left falls dead at his feet, yet the colonel is, if possible, cooler and more colloquial than ever.

"What's your name, my young friend?" says he, shaking the ashes from a short black pipe, with which he has been refreshing himself at intervals with much apparent zest. The officer replies, somewhat astonished, yet cool and composed as his commander. The colonel repeats it twice over, to make sure he has got it right, glances once more at the enemy, then looking his new acquaintance steadily in the face, observes —

"Do I seem to be in a *funk*, young man?"

"No," replies the young officer, determined not to be outdone, "not the least bit of one, any more than myself."

The colonel laughs heartily. "Very well," says he; "now, if I'm shot, I trust to you to do me justice. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I must communicate with my supports. Every aide-de-camp I send gets knocked over. I'm no use here alone — I can't take the Redan single-handed — so I'm going back myself. It's only three hundred yards, but I can't run quite so fast as I used, so if I'm killed, I shall expect you to bear witness that I didn't go voluntarily into that crossfire because *I was afraid.*"

The young officer promised, and the colonel started on his perilous errand. On the success of his mission or the tactics of that attack it is not my province to enlarge. Amongst all the conflicting opinions of the public, there is but one as to the daring gallantry and cool promptitude displayed on that memorable day by the leader of the assault.

Every man, however, moves in his own little world, even at the taking of Sebastopol. It was not for a nameless stranger, holding no rank in the service, to run into needless danger, and I was merely in the trenches as a looker-on, therefore did I keep sedulously under cover and out of fire. It is only the novice who exposes himself unnecessarily, and I had served too long with Omar Pasha not to appreciate the difference between the cool, calculating daring that willingly accepts a certain risk to attain a certain object, and the vainglorious foolhardiness that runs its head blindly against a wall for the mere display of its own intrinsic absurdity.

That great general himself was never known to expose his life unnecessarily. He would direct the manœuvres of his regiments, and display the tactics for which he was so superior, at a safe distance from the fire of an enemy, as long as he believed himself sufficiently near to watch every movement, and to anticipate every stratagem of the adversary; but if it was advisable to encourage his own troops with his presence, to head a charge, or rally a repulse, who so daring and so reckless as the fortunate Croatian adventurer?

And yet, with all my care and all my self-denial — for indeed, on occasions such as these, curiosity is a powerful motive, and there is a strange instinct in man's wilful heart that urges him into a fray — I had a narrow escape of my own life, and lost my oldest friend and comrade during the progress of the attack.

I was gazing eagerly through my double glasses — the very same that had often done me good service in such different scenes — to watch the forms of those devoted heroes who were staggering and falling in the smoke, when a stray shell, bursting in the trench behind me, blew my forage-cap from my head, and sent it spinning over the parapet on to the *glacis* beyond. Involuntarily I stretched my hand to catch at it as it flew away, and Bold, who had been crouching quietly at my heel, seeing the motion, started off in pursuit. Ere I could check him, the old dog was over the embankment, and in less than a minute returned to my side with the cap in his

mouth. The men laughed, and cheered him as he laid it at my feet.

Poor Bold! poor Bold! he waved his handsome tail, and reared his great square head as proudly as ever; but there was a wistful expression in his eye as he looked up in my face, and when I patted him the old dog winced and moaned as if in pain. He lay down, though quite gently, at my feet, and let me turn him over and examine him. I thought so — there it was, the small round mark in his glossy coat, and the dark stain down his thick fore-leg — my poor old friend and comrade, must I lose you too? Is everything to be taken from me by degrees? My eyes were blinded with tears — the rough soldiers felt for me, and spared my favourite some water from their canteens; but he growled when any one offered to touch him but myself, and he died licking my hand.

Even in the turmoil and confusion of that wild scene I could mourn for Bold. He was the one link with my peaceful boyhood, the one creature that she and I had both loved and fondled — and now *she* was lost to me for ever, and Bold lay dead at my feet. Besides, I was fond of him for his own sake — so faithful, so true, so attached, so brave and devoted — in truth, I was very, *very* sorry for poor Bold.

CHAPTER XIII.

The War-Minister at Home.

EXCEPT at the crisis of great convulsions, when the man with the bayonet is the only individual that clearly knows what he has got to do and how to do it, the soldier is but the puppet upon the stage, while the diplomatist pulls the strings from behind the scenes. Before Sebastopol the armies of England, France, and Sardinia keep watch and ward, ever ready for action; at Vienna, the spruce *attaché* deciphers and makes his *précis* of those dispatches which decide the soldier's fate. Is it to be peace or war? Has Russia entered into a league with the Austrian Government, or is the Kaiser, in his youthful enthusiasm, eager for an appeal to arms, and, forgetful of his defenceless capital, not thirty leagues from the Polish frontier, and innocent of a single fortified place between its walls and the enemy, prepared to join heart and hand with France and England against the common foe? These are questions everybody asks, but nobody seems able to answer. On the Bourse they cause a deal of gambling, and a considerable fluctuation in the value of the florin as computed with reference to English gold. Minor capitalists rise and fall, and Rothschild keeps on adding heap to heap. Money makes money, in Austria as in England; nor are those mustached and spectacled merchants smoking

cigars on the Bourse one whit less eager or less rapacious than our own smooth speculators on the Stock Exchange. The crowd is a little more motley, perhaps, and a little more demonstrative, but the object is the same.

"And what news have you here this morning, my dear sir?" observes a quiet-looking, well-dressed bystander who has just strolled in, to a plethoric individual, with a double chin, a double eye-glass, and a red umbrella, who is making voluminous entries in a huge pocket-book. The plethoric man bows to the ground, and becomes exceedingly purple in the face.

"None, honourable sir, none," he replies, with a circular sweep of his hat that touches his toes; "the market is flat, honourable sir, flat, and money, if possible, scarcer than usual."

Whereat the stout man laughs, but breaks off abruptly, as if much alarmed at the liberty he has taken. The well-dressed gentleman turns to some one else with the same inquiry, and, receiving a less cautious answer, glances at his fat friend, who pales visibly under his eye. They are all afraid of him here, for he is no other than our old acquaintance Monsieur Stein, clean, quiet, and undemonstrative as when we saw him last in the drawing-room at Edelhof. Let us follow him as he walks out and glides gently along the street in his dark, civil attire, relieved only by a bit of ribbon at the button-hole.

All great men have their weaknesses. Hercules, resting from his labours, spun yarns with Omphale;

Antony combined fishing and flirtation; Porson loved pale ale, and refreshed himself copiously therewith; and shall not Monsieur Stein, whose Protean genius can assume the characters of all these heroes, display his taste for the fine arts in so picturesque a capital as his own native Vienna? He stops accordingly at a huge stone basin ornamenting one of its squares, and, producing his note-book, proceeds to sketch with masterly touches the magnificent back and limbs of that bronze Triton preparing to launch his harpoon into the depths below. Sly Monsieur Stein! is it thus you spread your nets for the captivation of unwary damsels, and are you always rewarded by so ready a prey as that well-dressed *soubrette* who is peeping on tiptoe over your shoulder, and expressing her artless admiration of your talent in the superlative exclamations of her Teutonic idiom?

"Pardon me, honourable sir, that I so bold am, as so to overlook your wondrously-beautiful design, permit me to see it a little nearer. I thank you, love-worthy sir."

Monsieur Stein is too thoroughly Austrian not to be the pink of politeness. He doffs his hat, and hands her the note-book with a bow. As she returns it to him an open letter peeps between the leaves, and they part and march off on their several ways with many expressions of gratitude and politeness, such as two utter strangers make use of at the termination of a chance acquaintanceship; yet is the *soubrette* strangely like Jeannette, Princesse Vocqsal's *femme de chambre*; and the letter which Monsieur reads so attentively as he paces along the sunny

side of the street, is certainly addressed to that lady in characters bearing a strong resemblance to the handwriting of Victor, Count de Rohan.

Monsieur Stein pockets the epistle. It might be a receipt for *sour-kroust* for all the effect its perusal has on his impassible features, and proceeds, still at his equable, leisurely pace, to the residence of the War-Minister.

While he mounts the steps to the second floor, on which are situated the apartments of that functionary, and combs out his smooth mustaches, waiting the convenience of the porter who answers the bell, let us take a peep inside.

The War-Minister is at his wit's end. His morning has been a sadly troubled one, for he has been auditing accounts, to which pursuit he cherishes a strong disinclination, and he has received a letter from the Minister of the Interior, conveying contradictory orders from the Emperor, of which he cannot make head or tail. Besides this, he has private annoyances of his own. His intendant has failed to send him the usual supplies from his estates in Galicia; he is in debt to his tailor and his coach-maker, but he must have new liveries and an English carriage against the next Court ball; his favourite charger is lame, and he does not care to trust himself on any of his other horses; and, above all, he has sustained an hour's lecture this very morning, when drinking coffee in his dressing-gown, from Madame la Baronne, his austere and excellent spouse, commenting in severe terms on his backslidings and general conduct, the shortcomings of which, as that virtuous dame affirms,

have not failed to elicit the censure of the young Emperor himself. So the War-Minister has drunk three large tumblers of *schwarz-bier*, and smoked as many cigars stuck up on end in the bowl of a *meer-schaum* pipe, the combined effects of which have failed to simplify the accounts, or to reconcile the contradictory instructions of the Court.

He is a large, fine-looking man, considerably above six feet in height. His grey-blue uniform is buttoned tightly over a capacious chest, covered with orders, clasps, and medals; his blue eyes and florid complexion denote health and good-humour, not out of keeping with the snowy mustaches and hair of some threescore winters. He looks completely puzzled, and is bestowing an uneasy sort of attention, for which he feels he must ere long be taken to task, upon a very charming and well-dressed visitor of the other sex, no less a person, indeed, than that "*odious intrigante*," as Madame la Baronne calls her, the Princesse Vocqsal.

She is as much at home here in the War-Minister's apartments as in her own drawing-room. She never loses her *aplomb* or her presence of mind. If his wife were to walk in this minute she would greet her with amiable cordiality; and, to do Madame la Baronne justice, though she abuses the Princess in all societies, her greeting would be returned with the warmth and kindness universally displayed to each other by women who hate to the death. Till she has got her antagonist *down*, the female fencer never takes the button off her foil.

"You are always so amiable and good-humoured,

my dear Baron," says the Princess, throwing back her veil with a turn of her snowy wrist, not lost upon the old soldier, "that you will, I am sure, not keep us in suspense. The Prince wishes his nephew to serve the Emperor; he is but a boy yet. Will he be tall enough for the cavalry? A fine man looks so well on horseback!"

The Baron was justly proud of his person. This little compliment and the glance that accompanied it were not thrown away. He looked pleased, then remembered his wife, and looked sheepish, then smoothed his mustache, and inquired the age of the candidate.

"Seventeen next birthday," replied the Princess. "If it were not for this horrid war we would send him to travel a little. Do you think the war will last, Monsieur le Baron?" added she, naïvely.

"You must ask the Foreign Minister about that," replied he, completely thrown off his guard by her innocence. "We are only soldiers here, we do not pull the strings, Madame. We do what we are told, and serve the Emperor and the ladies," he added, with a low bow and a leer.

"Then will you put him into the Cuirassiers immediately, Monsieur?" said the Princess, with her sweetest smile; "we wish no time to be lost — now *do*, to please *me*."

The Baron was rather in a dilemma; like all men in office he hated to bind himself by a promise, but how to refuse that charming woman anything? — at last he stammered out — "wait a little, Madame, wait and I will do what I can for you; it

is impossible just now, for we are going to reduce the army by sixty thousand men."

While he spoke, Monsieur Stein was announced, and the Princess rose to take her leave; she had got all she wanted now, and did not care to face a thousand Baronesses. As she went down stairs, she passed Monsieur Stein without the slightest mark of recognition, and he, too, looked admiringly after her, as if he had never seen her before. The Baron, by this time pining for more *schwartz-bier*, and another cigar, devoutly hoped his new visitor, with whose person and profession he was quite familiar, would not stay long; and the Princess, as she tripped past the *Huissier* at the entrance, muttered, "sixty thousand men — then it *will* be peace: I thought so all along. My poor Baron! what a soft old creature you are! Well, I have tried everything now, and this speculating is the strongest excitement of all, even better than making Victor jealous!" but she sighed as she said it, and ordered her coachman to drive on at once to her stock-broker.

The presence of Monsieur Stein did not serve to re-establish either the clear-headedness or the good-humour of the War-Minister. The ostensible errand on which he came was merely to obtain some trifling military information concerning the garrison at Pesth, without which the co-operation of the police would not have been so effectual in annoying still further the already exasperated Hungarians; but in the course of conversation, Monsieur Stein subjected the Baron to a process familiarly called "sucking the brains," with such skill that, ere the door was closed

on his unwelcome visitor, the soldier felt he had placed himself — as indeed was intended — completely in the power of the police-agent. All his sins of omission and commission, his neglect of certain contracts, and his issuing of certain orders; his unpardonable lenity at his last tour of inspection, his unlucky expression of opinions at direct variance with those of his young Imperial master: — all these failures and offences he felt were now registered in letters never to be effaced, — on the records of Monsieur Stein's secret report; and what was more provoking still, was to think that he had, somehow or another, been insensibly led on to plead guilty to half-a-dozen derelictions, which he felt he might as consistently have denied.

As he sat bolt upright in his huge leathern chair, and turned once more to "sublime tobacco" for consolation and refreshment, his thoughts floated back to the merry days when he was young and slim, and had no cares beyond his squadron of Uhlans, no thought for the morrow but the parade and the ball. "Ah!" sighed the Baron to himself as he knocked the ash off his cigar with a ringed forefinger, "I would I were a youngling again; the troop-accounts were easily kept, the society of my comrades was pleasanter than the Court. One never meets with such beer now as we had at Debreczin; and oh! those Hungarian ladies, how delightful it was to waltz before one grew fat, and flirt before one grew sage. I might have visited the charming Princess then, and no one would have found fault with me; no one would have objected — Heigh-

ho! there was no *Madame la Baronne* in those days — *now* it is so different. *Sapperment!* Here she comes!”

Though the Baron was upwards of six feet, and broad in proportion — though he had distinguished himself more than once before the enemy, and was covered with orders of merit and decorations for bravery — nay, though he was the actual head of the six hundred thousand heroes who constituted the Austrian army, he quailed before that little shrivelled old woman, with her mouth full of black teeth, and her hair dressed à *l'Impératrice*.

We profane not the mysteries of Hymen — “Caudle” is a name of no exclusive nationality. We leave the Baron, not without a shudder, to the salutary discipline of his excellent monitress.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wheels within Wheels.

WE must follow Monsieur Stein, for that worthy has got something to do; nay, he generally has his hands full, and cannot, indeed, be accused of eating the bread of idleness. It is a strange system of government, that of the Austrian empire; and is, we believe, found to answer as badly as might be expected from its organization. The State takes so paternal an interest in the sayings and doings of its children, as to judge it expedient to support a whole staff of officials, whose sole duty it is to keep the Government informed respecting the habits, actions, every-day life, and secret thoughts and opinions of the general public. Nor do these myrmidons, whose number exceeds belief, and who add seriously to the national expenditure, fail to earn their pay with praiseworthy diligence. In all societies, in all places of pleasure or business, where half-a-dozen people may chance to congregate, *there* will be an agent of police, always in plain clothes, and generally the least conspicuous person in the throng. The members of this corps are, as may be supposed, chosen for their general intelligence and aptitude, are usually well-informed, agreeable men, likely to lead strangers into conversation, and excellent linguists.

As an instance of their ubiquity, I may mention an incident that occurred within my own knowledge to an officer in the British service, when at Vienna, during the war. That officer was dining in the *salon* of an hotel, and there were present, besides his own party, consisting of Englishmen, and one Hungarian much disaffected to the Government, only two other strangers, sitting quite at the further extremity of the room, and apparently out of ear-shot. The conversation at my friend's table was, moreover, carried on in English, and turned upon the arrest of a certain Colonel Türr, by the Austrian authorities at Bucharest, a few days previously.

This Colonel Türr, be it known, was a Hungarian who had deserted from the Austrian service, and entering that of her Majesty Queen Victoria, had been employed in some commissariat capacity in Wallachia, and taken prisoner at Bucharest by the very regiment to which he had previously belonged. The question was much vexed and agitated at the time, as to the Austrian right over a deserter on a neutral soil, and Colonel Türr became for the nonce an unconscious hero. The officer to whom I have alluded, having listened attentively to the *pros* and *cons* of the case, as set forth by his friends, dismissed the subject with military brevity, in these words: — "If you say he deserted his regiment before an enemy, I don't care what countryman he is, or in whose service, *the sooner they hang him the better!*" This ill-advised remark, be it observed, was made *sotto voce*, and in his own language. His surprise may be imagined when, on perusing the Government papers the following morn-

ing, he read the whole conversation, translated into magniloquent German, and detailed at length as being the expressed opinion of the British army and the British public on the case of Colonel Türr.

I am happy to be able to observe, *en passant*, that the latter gentleman was not hanged at all, but escaped, after a deal of diplomatic correspondence, with a six weeks' imprisonment in the fortress of Comorn, and has since been seen taking his pleasure in London and elsewhere.

To return to Monsieur Stein. It is evening, and those who have permission from the police to give a party, have lighted their lamps and prepared their saloons for those receptions in which the well-bred of all nations, and particularly the ladies, take so incomprehensible a delight. At Vienna, every house must be closed at ten o'clock; and those who wish to give balls or evening parties must obtain a direct permission to do so, emanating from the Emperor himself. So when they *do* go out, they make the most of it, and seem to enjoy the pleasure with an additional zest for the prohibition to which it is subject.

Let us follow Monsieur Stein into that brilliantly-lighted room, through which he edges his way so unobtrusively, and where, amongst rustling *toilettes*, crisp and fresh from the dressmaker, and various uniforms on the fine persons of the Austrian aristocracy, his own modest attire passes unobserved. This is no *bourgeois* gathering, no assemblage of the middle rank, tainted by mercantile enterprise, or disgraced by talent, which presumes to rise superior to *blood*.

No such thing; they are all the "*haute volée*" here, the "*crème de la crème*," as they themselves call it in their bad French and their conventional jargon. Probably Monsieur Stein is the only man in the room that cannot count at least sixteen quarterings, — no such easy matter to many a member of our own House of Peers; and truth to tell, the Austrian aristocracy are a personable, fine-looking race as you shall wish to see. Even the eye of our imperturbable police agent lights up with a ray of what in any other eye would be admiration, at the scene which presents itself as he enters. The rooms are spacious, lofty, and magnificently furnished in the massive, costly style that accords so well with visitors in full dress. The floors are beautifully inlaid and polished; as bright, and nearly as slippery, as ice. The walls are covered with the *chef-d'œuvres* of the old masters, and even the dome-like ceilings are decorated with mythological frescoes, such as would convert an enthusiast to paganism at once. Long mirrors fill up the interstices between the panellings, and reflect many a stalwart gallant, and many a "lady bright and fair." There is no dancing, it is merely a "reception;" and amongst the throng of beauties congregated in that assembly, impassible Monsieur Stein cannot but admit that the most captivating of them all is Princesse Vocqsal.

So thinks the War Minister, who, forgetful of accounts and responsibilities, regardless even of the threatening glances darted at him from the other end of the room by his excellent wife, is leaning over the back of the Princess's seat, and whispering, in

broad Viennese German, a variety of those soft platitudes which gentlemen of threescore are apt to fancy will do them as good service at that age as they did thirty years ago. The Baron is painfully agreeable, and she is listening, with a sweet smile and a pleasant expression of countenance, assumed for very sufficient reasons. In the first place, she owes him a good turn for the information acquired this morning, and the Princess always pays her debts when it costs her nothing; in the second, she wishes, for motives of her own, to strengthen her influence with the Court-party as much as possible; and lastly, she enjoys by this means the innocent pleasure of making two people unhappy — viz., *Madame la Baronne*, who is fool enough to be jealous of her fat old husband; and one other watching her from the doorway, with a pale, eager face, and an expression of restless, gnawing anxiety, which it is painful to behold.

Victor de Rohan, what are you doing here, like a moth fluttering round a candle? wasting your time, and breaking your heart for a woman that is not worth one throb of its generous life-blood; that cannot appreciate your devotion, or even spare your feelings? Why are you not at Edeldorf, where you have left *her* sad and lonely, one tear on whose eyelash is worth a thousand of the false smiles so freely dealt by that heartless, artificial, worn woman of the world? For shame, Victor! for shame! And yet, as our friend the Turk says, "*Kismet!* It is destiny!"

He is dressed in a gorgeous Hussar uniform, his own national costume, and right well does its close

fit and appropriate splendour become the stately beauty of the young Count de Rohan. At his side hangs the very sword that flashed so keenly by the waters of the Danube, forward in the headlong charge of old Iskender Bey. On its blade is engraved the Princess's name; she knows it as well as he does, yet ten to one she will pretend to forget all about it, should he allude to the subject to-night. Ah! the blade is as bright as it was in those merry campaigning days, but Victor's face has lost for ever the lightsome expression of youth; the lines of passion and self-reproach are stamped upon his brow, and hollowed round his lip, and he has passed at one stride from boyhood to middle age.

He makes a forced movement, as though to speak to her, but his button is held by a jocose old gentleman, whose raptures must find vent on the engrossing topic of Marie Taglioni's graceful activity; and he has to weather the whole person and draperies of a voluminous German dowager ere he can escape from his tormentor. In the meantime Monsieur Stein has been presented to the Princess, and she allows him to lead her into the tea-room, for a cup of that convenient beverage which Continental nations persist in considering as possessed of medicinal virtue.

"I have the unhappiness to have escaped Madame's recollection," observed the police agent, as he placed a chair for the Princess in a corner secure from interruption, and handed her cup; "it is now my good fortune to be able to restore something that she has lost," and he looked at her with those keen grey

eyes, as though to read her very soul, while he gave her the letter which had been placed in his pocket-book by faithless Jeannette. "If she cares for him," thought Monsieur Stein, "she will surely show it now, and I need take no further trouble with *her*. If not, she is the very woman I want, for the fool is madly in love with her, and upon my word it is not surprising!"

Monsieur Stein looked at women with hypercritical fastidiousness, but, as he himself boasted, at the same time, quite "*en philosophe*."

The Princess, however, was a match for the police agent; she never winced, or moved a muscle of her beautiful countenance. With a polite "Excuse me," she read the letter through from beginning to end, and turning quietly round, inquired, "How came you by this, Monsieur?"

Unless it leads to a *revoke*, a lie counts for nothing with a police agent, so he answered at once, "Sent to my *bureau* from the office, in consequence of an informality in the post-mark."

"You have read it?" pursued the Princess, still calm and unmoved.

"On my honour, no!" answered he, with his hand on his heart, and a low bow.

She would have made the better spy of the two, for she could read even his impassible face, and she knew as well as he did himself that he had, so she quietly returned him the letter, of which she judged, and rightly, that he had kept a copy; and laying her gloved hand on his sleeve, observed, with an air of

bewitching candour — “After that affair at Comorn, you and I can have no secrets from each other, Monsieur. Tell me frankly what it is that your employers require, and the price they are willing to pay for my co-operation.”

She could not resist the temptation of trying her powers, even on Monsieur Stein; and he, although a police agent, was obliged to succumb to that low, sweet voice, and the pleading glance by which it was accompanied. A little less calmly than was his wont, and with almost a flush upon his brow, he began —

“You are still desirous of that appointment we spoke of yesterday for the Prince?”

“*Ma foi*, I am,” she answered with a merry smile; “without it we shall be ruined, for we are indeed overwhelmed with debt.”

“You also wish for the earliest intelligence possessed by the Government (as to the issues of peace and war?”

“Of course I do, my dear Monsieur Stein; how else can I speculate to advantage?”

“And you would have the attainder taken off your cousin’s estates in the Banat in your favour?”

The Princess’s eyes glistened, and a deep flush overspread her face. This was more than she had ever dared to hope for. This would raise her to affluence, nay, to splendour, once again. No price would be too great to pay for this end, and she told Monsieur Stein so, although she kept down her raptures and stilled her beating heart the while.

"All this, Princess, I can obtain for you," said he; "all this has been promised me, and I have got it in writing. In less than a month the Government will have redeemed its pledge, and in return you shall do us one little favour."

"*C'est un trahison, n'est ce pas?*" she asked quickly, but without any appearance of shame or anger; "I know it by the price you offer. Well, I am not scrupulous — say on."

"Scarcely that," he replied, evidently emboldened by her coolness; "only a slight exertion of feminine influence, of which no woman on earth has so much at command as yourself. Listen, Princess; in three words I will tell you all. Count de Rohan loves you passionately — madly. You know it yourself; — forgive my freedom; between you and me there must be no secrets. You can do what you will with him." — (He did not see her blush, for she had turned away to put down her cup.) — "He will refuse you nothing. This is your task: — there is another conspiracy hatching against the Government; its plot is not yet ripe, but it numbers in its ranks some of the first men in Hungary. Your compatriots are very stanch; even I can get no certain information. Several of the disaffected are yet unknown to me. Young Count de Rohan has a list of their names; that list I trust to you to obtain. Say, Princess, is it a bargain?"

She was fitting her glove accurately to her taper fingers.

"And the man that you were good enough to

say adores me so devotedly, Monsieur," she observed, without lifting her eyes to his face; "what will you do with him? shoot him as you did his cousin in 1848?"

"He shall have a free pardon," replied the police agent, "and permission to reside on his lands. He is not anxious to leave the vicinity of the Waldenberg, I believe," he added, mischievously.

"*Soit*," responded the Princess, as she rose to put an end to the interview. "Now, if you will hand me my *bouquet* we will go into the other room."

As he bowed and left her, Monsieur Stein felt a certain uncomfortable misgiving that he had been guilty of some oversight in his game. In vain he played it all again in his own head, move for move, and check for check; he could not detect where the fault lay, and yet his fine instinct told him that somewhere or another he had made a mistake. "It is all that woman's impassible face," he concluded at last, in his mental soliloquy, "that forbids me to retrieve a blunder or detect an advantage. And what a beautiful face it is!" he added, almost aloud, as for an instant the official was absorbed in the man.

In the meantime Victor was getting very restless, very uncomfortable, and, not to mince matters, very cross.

No sooner had the Princess returned to the large *salon* than he stalked across the room, twirling his mustaches with an air of unconcealed annoyance,

and asked her abruptly, "How she came to know that ill-looking Monsieur Stein, and why he had been flirting with her for the last half-hour in the tea-room?"

"That gentleman in plain clothes?" answered she, with an air of utter unconsciousness and perfect good-humour, "that is one of my ancient friends, Monsieur le Comte; shall I present him to you?"

This was another refined method of tormenting her lovers. The Princess had one answer to all jealous inquiries as to those whom she favoured with her notice — "*Un de mes anciens amis*," was a vague and general description, calculated to give no very definite or satisfactory information to a rival.

"Have a care, Madame," whispered Victor, angrily; "you will make some of your ancient friends into your deadliest enemies if you try them so far."

She looked lovingly up at him, and he softened at once.

"Now it is *you* that are unkind, Victor," she said, in a low soft voice, every tone of which thrilled to the young Count's heart. "Why will you persist in quarrelling with me? I, who came here this very evening to see you and to do you a kindness?"

"Did you know I should be in Vienna so soon?" he exclaimed, eagerly. "Did you receive my letter?"

"I did, indeed," she replied, with a covert smile, as she thought of the mode in which that missive

had reached her, and she almost laughed outright (for the Princess had a keen sense of the ludicrous) at the strange impersonation made by Monsieur Stein of Cupid's postman; "but Victor," she added, with another beaming look, "I go away to-morrow. Very early in the morning I must leave Vienna."

He turned paler than before, and bit his lip. "So I might as well have stayed at home," he exclaimed in a voice of bitter annoyance and pique, none the less bitter that it had to be toned down to the concert pitch of good society. "Was it to see you for five minutes here in a crowd that I travelled up so eagerly and in such haste? To make my bow, I suppose, like the merest acquaintance, and receive my *congé*. Pardon, Madame la Princesse, I need not receive it twice. I wish you good evening; I am going now!"

She, too, became a shade paler, but preserved the immovable good-humour on which she piqued herself, as she made him a polite bow, and turned round to speak to the Russian Minister, who, covered with orders, at that moment came up to offer his obeisance to the well-known Princesse Vocqsal. Had he not constant advices from his intriguing Court to devote much of his spare time to this fascinating lady? And had she not once in her life baffled all the wiles of St. Petersburg, and stood untempted by its bribes? Ill-natured people affirmed that another Power paid a higher price, which accounted satisfactorily for the lady's patriotism, but the Autocrat's Minister had his secret orders notwithstanding.

And now she is deep in a lively argument, in which polished sarcasm and brilliant repartee are bandied from lip to lip, each pointed phrase eliciting a something better still from the Princess's soft mouth, till her audience — diplomatists of many years' standing, warriors shrewd in council and dauntless in the field, grey ambassadors and beardless *attachés* — hang enraptured on her accents, and watch her looks with an unaccountable fascination; whilst Victor de Rohan, hurt, moody, and discontented, stalks fiercely to the doorway and mutters to himself, "Is it for this I have given up home, friends, honour, and self-respect? To be a mere puppet in the hands of a coquette, a woman's plaything, and not even a favourite plaything, after all!"

Ladies have a peculiar gift which is enjoyed by no other members of the creation whatsoever. We allude to that extraordinary property by which, without any exertion of the visual organs, they can discern clearly all that is going on above, below, around, and behind them. If a man wants to *see* a thing he requires to *look at it*. Not so with the other sex. Their subtler instinct enables them to detect that which must be made palpable to *our* grosser senses. How else could Princesse Vocqsal, whose back was turned to him, and who was occupied in conversation with the *élite* of Austrian diplomatic society, arrive at the certainty that Victor was not gone, as he had threatened — that he still lingered unwillingly about the doorway, and now hailed as

deliverers those prosy acquaintances from whom, in the early part of the evening, he had been so impatient to escape?

And yet he despised himself for his want of manhood and resolution the while; and yet he reproached himself with his slavish submission and unworthy cowardice; and yet he lingered on in hopes of one more glance from her eye, one more pressure from her soft gloved hand. He had parted with her in anger before, and too well he knew the bitter wretchedness of the subsequent hours; he had not fortitude enough, he *dared* not face such an ordeal again.

So she knew he was not going yet; and, confident in her own powers, pleased with her position, and proud of her conquests, she sparkled on.

"That's a clever woman," said an English *attaché* to his friend, as they listened in the circle of her admirers.

And the friend, who was a little of a satirist, a little of a philosopher, a little of a poet, and yet, strange to say, a thorough man of the world, replied —

"Too clever by half, my boy, or I'm very much mistaken. Ninety-nine women out of a hundred are natural-born angels, but the hundredth is a devil incarnate, and *that's* her number, Charlie, you may take my word for it!"

And now a strange movement rises in that

crowded assembly. A buzz of voices is heard — lower, but more marked than the ordinary hum of conversation. Something seems to have happened. A lady has fainted, or an apoplectic general been taken suddenly ill, or a candelabrum has fallen, and the magnificent hotel is even now on fire? None of these casualties, however, have occurred. Voices rise higher in question and reply, “Is it true?” — “I can’t believe it!” — “They knew nothing of it to-day on the Bourse.” — “Another stock-jobbing report.” — “Immense loss on both sides.” These are the disjointed sentences that reach the ear, mingled with such terms as the Malakhoff — the Redan — the north side — General Pelissier, &c. &c. English and French diplomatists exchange curious glances, and at length rumour takes a definite form, and it is boldly asserted that intelligence has that day arrived of the fall of Sebastopol.

Tongues are loosened now. Surmise and speculation are rife upon future events. Men speak as they wish, and notwithstanding the presence of Monsieur Stein and several other secret agents of police, many a bold opinion is hazarded as to the intentions of the Government and the issues of the great contest. Princesse Vocqsal scarcely breathes while she listens. If, indeed, this should lead to peace, her large investments will realize golden profits. She feels all the palpitating excitement of the gambler, yet does the hue not deepen on her cheek, nor the lustre kindle brighter in her eye. Monsieur Stein, who alone knows her secrets, as it is his business to know

the secrets of every one, feels his very soul stirred within him at such noble self-command.

For a moment he thinks that were he capable of human weaknesses he could *love* that woman; and in pure admiration, as one who would fain prove still further a beautiful piece of mechanism, he steps up to the Princess, and informs her that, "Now, indeed, doubt is at an end, for reliable intelligence has arrived that Sebastopol has fallen!"

"Sebastopol has fallen," she repeats with her silver laugh; "then the war has at last really begun!"

Her audience applaud once more. "*Ma foi, ce n'est pas mal,*" says the French Minister, and Monsieur Stein is on the verge of adoration; but there is by this time a general move towards the door: carriages are being called, and it is time to go away, the departure of the guests being somewhat accelerated by the important news which has just been made public. Victor is still lingering on the staircase. Many a bright eye looks wistfully on his handsome form, many a soft heart would willingly waken an interest in the charming young Count de Rohan, but the Hungarian has caught the malady in its deadliest form — the "love fever," as his own poets term it, is wasting his heart to the core, and for him, alas! there is but one woman on earth, and she is coming down-stairs at this moment, attended by the best-dressed and best-looking *attaché* of the French Legation.

Somewhat to this young gentleman's disgust, she sends him to look for her carriage, and taking Victor's arm, which he is too proud to offer, she bids him lead her to the cloak-room, and shawl her as he used to do with such tender care.

He relents at once. What *is* there in this woman that she can thus turn and twist him at her will? She likes him best thus — When he is haughty and rebellious, and she fears that at last she may have driven him too far and have lost him altogether, the uncertainty creates an interest and excitement, which is pleasure akin to pain, but it is *so* delightful to win him back again, — *such* a triumph to own him and tyrannize over him once more! It is at moments of reconciliation such as these that the Princess vindicates her woman-nature, and becomes a very woman to the heart.

"You are angry with me, Victor," she whispers, leaning heavily on his arm, and looking downwards as she speaks; "angry with me, and without a cause. You would not listen to me an hour ago, you were so cross and impatient. Will you listen to me now?"

The tears were standing in the strong man's eyes. "Speak on," he said; "you do with me what you like, I could listen to you for ever."

"You were irritated because I told you I was about to leave Vienna. You have avoided me the whole evening, and left me to be bored and annoyed by that wearisome tribe of diplomatists, with their

flat witticisms and their eternal politics. Why did you not stay to hear me out? Victor, it is true I go to-morrow, but I go to the Waldenberg."

How changed his face was now; his eye sparkled and his whole countenance lightened up. He looked like a different man. He could only press the arm that clung to his own; he could not speak.

"Will you continue to *bouder* me?" proceeded the Princess in a playful, half-malicious tone; "or will you forgive me and be friends for that which is, after all, your own fault? Oh, you men! how hasty and violent you are; it is lucky *we* are so patient and so good tempered. The Waldenberg is not so very far from Edeldorf. You might ask me there for your *jour de fête*. I have not forgotten it, you see. Not a word more, Count de Rohan; I must leave you *now*. Here is my carriage. Adieu, — no, not adieu, *mon ami, au revoir!*"

Why was it such a different world to Victor from what it had been ten short minutes ago, from what it would assuredly be the next time they met, and her caprice and *coquetterie* were again exhibited to drive him wild? Was it worth all these days of uncertainty and anxious longing; all these fits of jealousy and agonies of self-reproach; to be deliriously happy every now and then for a short ten minutes? Was any woman on earth worthy of all that Victor de Rohan sacrificed for the indulgence of his guilty love? Probably not, but it would have been hard to convince him. He was not as wise as Solomon; yet Solomon, with all his wisdom, seems to have de-

livered himself up a willing captive to disgrace and bondage — fettered by a pair of white arms — held by a thread of silken hair. Oh, vanity of vanities!

"this is also vanity and vexation of spirit."

CHAPTER XV.

"Too Late."

FOR a wounded campaigner on crutches, or a wasted convalescent slowly recovering from an attack of Crimean fever, there are few better places for the re-establishment of health than the hotel at Therapia. It is refreshing to hear the ripple of the Bosphorus not ten feet distant from one's bedroom window; it is life itself to inhale the invigorating breeze that sweeps down, unchecked and uncontaminated, from the Black Sea; it is inspiring to gaze upon the gorgeous beauty of the Asiatic coast, another continent not a mile away. And then the smaller accessories of comfortable apartments, good dinners, civilized luxuries, and European society, form no unwelcome contrast to the Crimean tent, the soldier's rations, and the wearisome routine of daily and hourly duty.

But a few days after the taking of Sebastopol, I was once more in Turkey. Ropsley, the man of iron nerves and strong will — the man whom danger had spared, and sickness had hitherto passed by, was struck down by fever, — that wasting, paralyzing disease so common to our countrymen in an Eastern climate, and was so reduced and helpless as to be utterly incapable of moving without assistance.

He had many friends, for Ropsley was popular in his regiment and respected throughout the army; but none were so thoroughly disengaged as I; it seemed as if I could now be of little use in any capacity, and to my lot it fell to place my old schoolfellow on board ship, and accompany him to Therapia *en route* for England on sick leave.

My own affairs, too, required that I should revisit Somersetshire before long. The wreck of my father's property, well nursed and taken care of by a prudent man of business, had increased to no contemptible provision for a nameless child. If I chose to return to England, I should find myself a landed proprietor of no inconsiderable means, should be enabled to assume a position such as many a man now fighting his way in the world would esteem the acme of human felicity, and for me it would be but dust and ashes! What cared I for broad acres, local influence, good investments, and county respectability — all the outward show and empty shadows for which people are so apt to sacrifice the real blessings of life? What was it to me that I might look round from my own dining-room on my own domain, with my own tenants waiting to see me in the hall? An empty heart can have no possessions; a broken spirit is but a beggar in the midst of wealth, whilst the whole universe, with all its glories, belongs alone to him who is at peace with himself. I often think how many a man there is who lives out his three-score years and ten, and never knows what *real* life is, after all. A boyhood passed in vain aspirations — a manhood spent in struggling for the impossible

— an old age wasted in futile repinings, such is the use made by how many of our fellow-creatures of that glorious streak of light which we call existence, that intervenes between the eternity which hath been, and the eternity which shall be? Oh! to lie down and rest, and look back upon the day's hard labour, and feel that something has been wrought — that something has been *won!* and so to sleep, — happy here — happy for evermore. Well, on some natures happiness smiles even here on earth — God forbid it should be otherwise! — and some must content themselves with duty instead. Who knows which shall have the best of it when all is over? For me, it was plain at this period that I must do my *devoir*, and leave all to Time, the great restorer in the moral, as he is the great destroyer in the physical, world. The years of excitement (none know how strong) that I had lately passed, followed by a listless, hopeless inactivity, had produced a reaction on my spirits which it was necessary to conquer and shake off. I resolved to return to England, to set my house in order — to do all the good in my power, and first of all, strenuously to commence with that which lay nearest my hand, although it was but the humble task of nursing my old schoolfellow through an attack of low fever.

My patient possessed one of those strong and yet elastic natures which even sickness seems unable thoroughly to subdue. The Ropsley on a couch of suffering and lassitude, was the same Ropsley that confronted the enemy's fire so coolly in the Crimea, and sneered at the follies of his friends so sarcasti-

cally in St. James's-street. Ill as he was, and utterly prostrated in body, he was clear-headed and ready-witted as ever. With the help of a wretchedly bad grammar, he was rapidly picking up Turkish, by no means an easy language for a beginner; and, taking advantage of my society, was actually entering upon the rudiments of Hungarian, a tongue which it is next to impossible for any one to acquire who has not spoken it, as I had done, in earliest childhood. He was good-humoured and patient, too, far more than I should have expected, and was never anxious or irritable, save about his letters. I have seen him, however, turn away from a negative to the eager inquiry "any letters for me," with an expression of heart-sick longing that it pained me to witness on that usually haughty and somewhat sneering countenance.

But it came at last. Not many mornings after our arrival at Therapia there was a letter for Ropsley, which seemed to afford him unconcealed satisfaction, and from that day the Guardsman mended rapidly, and began to talk of getting up and packing his things, and starting westward once more.

So it came to pass that, with the help of his servant, I got him out of bed and dressed him, and laid him on the sofa at the open window, where he could see the light caiques dancing gaily on the waters, and the restless sea-fowl flitting eternally to and fro, and could hear the shouts of the Turkish boatmen, adjuring each other, very unnecessarily, not to be too hasty; and the discordant cries of the Greek

population scolding, and cheating, and vociferating on the quay.

We talked of Hungary. I loved to talk of it now, for was it not *her* country of whom I must think no more? And Ropsley's manner was kinder, and his voice softer, than I had ever thought it before. Poor fellow! he was weak with his illness, perhaps, but hitherto I had remarked no alteration in his cold, impassible demeanour.

At last he took my hand, and in a hollow voice he said — "Vere, you have returned me good for evil. You have behaved to me like a brother. Vere, I believe *you* really are a Christian!"

"I hope so," I replied quietly, for what had I but that?

"Yes," he resumed, "but I don't mean conventionally, because your godfathers and godmothers at your baptism *said* you were — I mean *really*. I don't believe there is a particle of *humbug* about you. Can you forgive your enemies?"

"I have already told you so," I answered; "don't you remember that night in the trenches? besides, Ropsley, I shall never consider you my enemy."

"That is exactly what cuts me to the heart," he replied, flushing up over his wan, wasted face. "I have injured you more deeply than any one on earth, and I have received nothing but kindness in return. Often and often I have longed to tell you all — how I had wronged you, and how I had repented, but my pride forbade me till to-day. It is dreadful to think that I might have died, and never confessed to you

how hard and how unfeeling I have been. Listen to me, and then forgive me if you can. Oh! Vere, Vere, had it not been for me and my selfishness, you might have married Constance Beverley!"

I felt I was trembling all over; I covered my face with my hands and turned away, but I bade him go on.

"Her father was never averse to you from the first. He liked you, Vere, personally, and still more for the sake of *your* father, his old friend. There was but one objection. I need not dwell upon it; and even that he could have got over, for he was most anxious to see his daughter married, and to one with whom he could have made his own terms. He was an unscrupulous man, Sir Harry, and dreadfully pressed for money. When in that predicament people will do things that at other times they would be ashamed of, as I know too well. And the girl too, Vere, she loved you — I am sure of it — she loved you, poor girl, with all her heart and soul."

I looked him straight in the face — "Not a word of *her*, Ropsley, as you are a gentleman!" I said. Oh, the agony of that moment! and yet it was not all pain.

"Well," he proceeded, "Sir Harry consulted me about the match. You know how intimate we were, you know what confidence he had in my judgment. If I had been generous and honourable, if I had been such a man as *you*, Vere, how much happier we should all be now; but no, I had my own ends in view,

and I determined to work out my own purpose, without looking to the right or left, without turning aside for friend or foe. Besides, I hardly knew you then, Vere. I did not appreciate your good qualities. I did not know your courage, and constancy, and patience, and kindliness. I did not know yours was just the clinging, womanly nature, that would never get over the crushing of its best affections — and I know it now too well. Oh, Vere, you never *can* forgive me. And yet," he added, musingly, more to himself than to me, — "and yet, even had I known all this, had you been my own brother, I fear my nature was then so hard, so pitiless, so uncompromising, that I should have gone straight on towards my aim, and blasted your happiness without scruple or remorse. *Remorse*," and the old look came over him, the old sneering look, that wreathed those handsome features in the wicked smile of a fallen angel — "if a man means to *repent* of what he has done, he had better not *do it*. My maxim has always been, 'never look back,' — '*vestigia nulla retrorsum*,' and yet to-day I cannot help retracing, ay, and bitterly *regretting*, the past.

"I have told you I had my own ends in view. I wished to marry the heiress myself. Not that I loved her, Vere — do not be angry with me for the confession, I never loved her the least in the world. She was far too placid, too conventional, too like other girls, to make the slightest impression on me. My ideal of a woman is, a bold, strong nature, a keen intellect, a daring mind, and a dazzling beauty

that others must fall down and worship. I never was one of your sentimentalists. A violet may be a very pretty flower, and smell very sweet, but I like a camellia best, and all the better because you require a hothouse to raise it in. But, if I did not care for Miss Beverley, I cared a good deal for Beverley Manor, and I resolved that, come what might, Beverley Manor should one day be mine. The young lady I looked upon as an encumbrance that must necessarily accompany the estate. You know how intimate I became with her father, you know the trust he reposed in me, and the habit into which he fell, of doing nothing without my advice. That trust, I now acknowledge to you, I abused shamefully; of that habit I took advantage, solely to further my own ends, totally irrespective of my friend. He confided to me in very early days his intention of marrying his daughter to the son of his old friend. He talked it over with me as a scheme on which he had set his heart, and, above all, insisted on the advantage to himself of making, as he called it, his own terms with you about settlements, &c. I have already told you he was involved in difficulties from which his daughter's marriage could alone free him, with the consent of her husband. I need not enter into particulars. I have the deeds and law-papers at my fingers' ends, for I like to understand a business thoroughly if I embark on it at all, but it is no question of such matters now. Well, Vere, at first I was too prudent to object overtly to the plan. Sir Harry, as you know, was an obstinate, wilful man,

and such a course would have been the one of all others most calculated to wed him more firmly than ever to his original intention; but I weighed the matter carefully with him day by day, now bringing forward arguments in favour of it, now starting objections, till I had insensibly accustomed him to consider it by no means as a settled affair. Then I tried all my powers upon the young lady, and there, I confess to you freely, Vere, I was completely foiled. She never liked me even as an acquaintance, and she took no pains to conceal her aversion. How angry she used to make me sometimes! — I *hated* her so, that I longed to make her mine, if it were only to humble her, as much as if I had loved her with all my heart and soul. Many a time I used to grind my teeth and mutter to myself, ‘Ah! my fair enemy, I shall live to make you rue this treatment;’ and I swore a great oath that, come what might, she should never belong to Vere Egerton. I even tried to create an interest in her mind for Victor de Rohan, but the girl was as true as steel. I have been accustomed to read characters all my life, women’s as well as men’s, it is part of my profession;” and Ropsley laughed once more his bitter laugh; “and many a trifling incident showed me that Constance Beverley cared for nobody on earth but you. This only made me more determined not to be beat; and little by little, with hints here and whispers there, assisted by your own strange, solitary habits, and the history of your poor father’s life and death, I persuaded Sir Harry that there was madness in your family, and that you had

inherited the curse. From the day on which he became convinced of this, I felt I had won my race. No power on earth would then have induced him to let you marry his daughter, and the excuse which he made you on that memorable afternoon, when you had so gallantly rescued her from death, was but a gentlemanlike way of getting out of his difficulty about telling you the real truth. Vere, that girl's courage is wonderful. She came down to dinner that night with the air of an Empress, but with a face like marble, and a dull stony look in her eyes that made even *me* almost rue what I had done. She kept her room for a fortnight afterwards, and I cannot help feeling she has never looked as bright since.

"When you went away I acknowledge I thought the field was my own. In consideration of my almost ruining myself to preserve him from shame, Sir Harry promised me his daughter if I 'could win her consent, and you may depend upon it I tried hard to do so. It was all in vain; the girl hated me more and more, and when we all met so unexpectedly in Vienna, I saw that my chance of Beverley Manor was indeed a hopeless one. Sir Harry, too, was getting very infirm. Had he died before his daughter's marriage, his bills for the money I had lent him were not worth the stamps on which they were drawn. My only chance was her speedy union with some one rich enough to make the necessary sacrifices, and again I picked out Victor de Rohan as the man. We all thought then you were engaged to his sister Valérie."

Ropsley blushed scarlet as he mentioned that name.

"And it was not my part to conceal the surmise from Miss Beverley. 'She was *so* glad, she was *so* thankful,' she said, 'she was *so* happy, for Vere's sake;' and a month afterwards she was Countess de Rohan, with the handsomest husband and the finest place in Hungary. It was a *mariage de convenance*, I fear, on both sides. I know now what I allow I did not dream of then, that Victor himself was the victim of an unfortunate attachment at the time, and that he married the beautiful Miss Beverley out of *pique*. Sir Harry died, as you know, within three months. I have saved myself from ruin, and I have destroyed the happiness on earth of three people that never did me the slightest harm. Vere, I do not deserve to be forgiven, I do not deserve ever to rise again from this couch; and yet there is *one* for whose sake I would fain get well — *one* whom I *must* see yet again before I die."

He burst into tears as he spoke. Good heaven! this man was mortal after all — an erring, sinful mortal, like the rest of us, with broken pride, heart-felt repentance, thrilling hopes and fears. Another bruised reed, though he had stood so defiant and erect, confronting the whirlwind and the thunderbolt, but shivered up, and cowering at the whisper of the "still small voice." Poor fellow! poor Ropsley! I pitied him from my heart, while he hid his face in his hands, and the big tears forced them-

selves through his wasted fingers; freely I forgave him, and freely I told him so.

After a time he became more composed, and then, as if ashamed of his weakness, assumed once more the cold satirical manner, half-sarcasm, half-pleasantry, which has become the conventional disguise of the world in which such men as Ropsley delight to live. Little by little he confided to me the rise and progress of his attachment to Valérie — at which I had already partly guessed — acknowledged how, for a long time, he had imagined that I was again a favoured rival, destined ever to stand in his way; how my sudden departure from Vienna and her incomprehensible indifference to that hasty retreat had led him to believe that she had entertained nothing but a girl's passing inclination for her brother's comrade; and how, before he reached his regiment in the Crimea, she had promised to be his on the conclusion of the war. "I never cared for any other woman on earth," said Ropsley, once more relapsing into the broken accents of real, deep feeling. "I never reflected till I knew her what a life mine has been. God forgive me, Vere; if we had met earlier, I should have been a different man. I have received a letter from her to-day. I shall be well enough to move by the end of the week. Vere, I *must* go through Hungary, and stop at Edeldorf on my way to England!"

As I walked out to inhale the evening breeze and indulge my own thoughts in solitude by the margin of the peaceful Bosphorus, I felt almost

stunned, like a man who has sustained a severe fall, or one who wakes suddenly from an astounding dream. And yet I might have guessed long ago at the purport of Ropsley's late revelations. Diffident as I was of my own merits, there had been times when my heart told me, with a voice there was no disputing, that I was beloved by Constance Beverley; and now it was with something like a feeling of relief and exhilaration that I recalled the assurance of that fact from one himself so interested and so difficult to deceive as Ropsley. "And she loved me all along," I thought, with a thrill of pleasure, sadly dashed with pain. "She was true and pure, as I always thought her; and even now, though she is wedded to another, though she never can be mine on earth, perhaps —" And here I stopped, for the cold, sickening impossibility chilled me to the marrow, and an insurmountable barrier seemed to rise up around me and hem me in on every side. It was sin to love her, it was sin to think of her now. Oh! misery! misery! and yet I would give my life to see her once more! So my good angel whispered in my ear, "You must never look on her again; for the rest of your time you must tread the weary path alone, and learn to be kindly, and pure, and holy for *her* sake." And self muttered, "Where would be the harm of seeing her just once again? — of satisfying yourself with your own eyes that she is happy? — of learning at once to be indifferent to her presence? You *must* go home. Edeldorf lies in your direct road to England; you cannot abandon

Ropsley in his present state, with no one to nurse and take care of him. Victor is your oldest friend, he would be hurt if you did not pay him a visit. It would be more courageous to face the Countess at once, and get it over." And I listened now to one and now to the other, and the struggle raged and tore within me the while I paced sadly up and down "by the side of the sounding sea."

"Egerton! how goes it? Let me present to you my friends," exclaimed a voice I recognised on the instant, as, with lowered head and dreamy vision, I walked right into the centre of a particularly smart party, and was "brought up," as the sailors say, "all standing," by a white silk parasol and a mass of flounces that almost took my breath away. When you most require solitude, it generally happens that you find yourself forced into society, and with all my regard for our *ci-devant* usher, I never met Manners, now a jolly Colonel of Bashi-Bazouks, with so little gratification as at this moment. I am bound to admit, however, that on his side all was cordiality and delight. Dressed out to the utmost magnificence of his gorgeous uniform, spurs clanking, and sabretasche jingling, his person stouter, his beard more exuberant, his face more florid and prosperous than ever, surrounded, too, by a bevy of ladies of French extraction and Pera manners, the "soldier of fortune," for such he might fairly be called, was indeed in his glory. With many flourishes and compliments in bad French, I was presented successively to Mesdemoiselles Philippine,

and Josephine, and Seraphine, all dark-eyed, black-haired, sallow-faced, but by no means bad-looking, young ladies, all apparently bent upon the capture and destruction of anything and everything that came within range of their artillery, and all apparently belonging equally to my warlike and fortunate friend. He then took me by the arm, and dropping behind the three graces aforesaid, informed me, in tones of repressed exultation, how his fortune was made at last, how he now commanded (the dearest object of his ambition) a regiment of actual cavalry, and how he was on the eve of marriage with one of the young ladies in front of us, with a dowry of a hundred thousand francs, who loved him to distraction, and was willing to accompany him to Shumla, there to take the lead in society, and help him to civilize his regiment of Bashi-Bazouks.

"I always told you I was fit for something, Egerton," said Lieutenant-Colonel Manners, with a glow of exultation on his simple face; "and I have made my own way at last, in despite of all obstacles. It's pluck, sir, that makes the man! pluck and *muscle*," doubling his arm as he spoke, in the old Everdon manner. "I have done it at last, and you'll see, my dear Egerton, I shall live to be a general."

"I hope from my heart you may," was my reply, as I bade him "farewell," and congratulated him on his position, his good fortune, and his bride; though

I never made out exactly whether it was Mademoiselle Josephine, or Philippine, or Seraphine who was to enjoy the unspeakable felicity of becoming Mrs. Colonel Manners.

CHAPTER XVI.

"The Skeleton."

It is one of the conventional grievances of the world to mourn over the mutability of human affairs, the ever-recurring changes incidental to that short span of existence here which we are pleased to term Life, as if the scenes and characters with which we are familiar were always being mingled and shifted with the rapidity and confusion of a pantomime. It has often struck me that the circumstances which encircle us do *not* by any means change with such extraordinary rapidity and facility — that, like a French road, with its mile after mile of level fertility and unvarying poplars, our path is sometimes for years together undiversified by any great variety of incident, any glimpse of romance; and that the same people, the same habits, the same pleasures, and the same annoyances seemed destined to surround and hem us in from the cradle to the grave. Which is the most numerous class, those who fear their lot *may* change, or those who hope it *will*? Can we make this change for ourselves? Are we the slaves of circumstances, or is not that the opportunity of the strong which is the destiny of the weak? Surely it must be so — surely the stout heart that struggles on must win at last — surely man is a free agent;

and he who fails, fails not because his task is impossible, but that he himself is faint and weak and infatuated enough to hope that he alone will be an exception to the common lot, and achieve the prize without the labour, *Sine pulvere palmam*.

The old castle at Edeldorf, at least, is but little changed from what I recollect it in my quiet boyhood, when with my dear father I first entered its lofty halls and made acquaintance with the beautiful blue-eyed child that now sits at the end of that table a grown-up, handsome man. Yes, once more I am at Edeldorf. Despite all my scruples, despite all the struggles between my worse and better self I could *not* resist the temptation of seeing her in her stately home; of satisfying myself with my own eyes that she was happy, and of bidding her a long and last farewell. Oh! I thirsted to see her just once again, only to see her, and then to go away and meet her never, never more. Therefore Ropsley and I journeyed through Bulgaria and up the Danube, and arrived late at Edeldorf, and were cordially welcomed by Victor, and dressed, and came down to dinner, and so I saw her.

She was altered, too; so much altered, and yet it was the well-known face, *her* face still; but there were lines on the white forehead I remembered once so smooth and fair, and the eyes were sunk and the cheek pale and fallen; when she smiled, too, the beautiful lips parted as sweetly as their wont, but the nether one quivered as though it were more used to weeping than laughing, and the smile vanished

quickly, and left a deeper shadow as it faded. She was not happy. I was *sure* she was not happy, and, shall I confess it? the certainty was not to me a feeling of unmixed pain. I would have given every drop of blood in my body to make her so, and yet I could not grieve as I felt I ought to grieve, that it was otherwise.

Perhaps one of the greatest trials imposed on us by the artificial state of society in which we live, is the mask of iron that it forces us to wear for the concealment of all the deeper and stronger feelings of our nature. There we sit in that magnificent hall, hung around with horn of stag and tusk of boar, and all the trophies of the chase, waited on by Hungarian retainers in their gorgeous hussar uniforms, before a table heaped to profusion with the good things that minister to the gratification of the palate, and conversing upon those light and frivolous topics beyond which it is treason to venture, while the hearts probably of every one of us are far, far distant in some region of pain unknown and unguessed by all save the secret sufferers, who hide away their hoarded sorrows under an exterior of flippant levity, and affect to ignore their neighbour's wounds as completely as they veil their own. What care Ropsley or Valérie whether *perdrix aux champignons* is or is not a better thing than *dindon aux truffes*? They are dying to be alone with each other once more — she, all anxiety to hear of his campaign and his illness; he, restless and preoccupied till he can tell her of his plans and prospects, and the arrangements that must be concluded before he can

make her his own. Both, for want of a better grievance, somewhat disgusted that the order of precedence in going to dinner has placed them opposite each other, instead of side by side. And yet Valérie, who sits by me, seems well pleased to meet her old friend once more; if I had ever thought she really cared for me, I should be undeceived now, when I mark the joyous frankness of her manner, the happy blush that comes and goes upon her cheek, and the restless glances that ever and anon she casts at her lover's handsome face through the *épergne* of flowers and fruit that divides them. No, they think as little of the ball of conversation which we jugglers toss about to each other, and jingle and play with and despise, as does the pale stately Countess herself, with her dark eyes and her dreamy look apparently gazing far into another world. She is not watching Victor, she seems scarcely aware of his presence; and yet many a young wife as beautiful, as high-spirited, and as lately married, would sit uneasily at the top of her own table, would frown, and fret, and chafe to see her handsome husband so preoccupied by another as is the Count by the fair guest on his right hand — who but wicked Princesse Vocqsal?

That lady has, according to custom, surrounded herself by a system of fortification wherewith, as it were, she seems metaphorically to set the world at defiance: a challenge which, to do her justice, the Princess is ever ready to offer, the antagonist not always willing to accept. She delights in being the object of small attentions, so she invariably requires

a footstool, an extra cushion or two, and a flask of *Eau de Cologne*, in addition to her bouquet, her fan, her gloves, her pocket-handkerchief, and such necessary articles of female superfluity. With these outworks and defences within which to retire on the failure of an attack, it is easy to carry out a system of aggressive warfare; and whether it is the presence of his wife that makes the amusement particularly exciting, or whether Count de Rohan has made himself to-day peculiarly agreeable, or whether it is possible, though this contingency is extremely unlikely, that the Prince has *told her not*, certainly *Madame la Princesse* is taking unusual pains, and that most unnecessarily, to bring Victor into more than common subjection to her fascinations.

She is without contradiction the best dressed woman in the room; her light gossamer robe, fold upon fold, and flounce upon flounce, floats around her like a drapery of clouds; her gloves fit her to a miracle; her exquisitely-shaped hands and round white arms bear few ornaments, but these are of the rarest and costliest description; her blooming, fresh complexion accords well with those luxuriant masses of soft brown hair escaping here and there from its smooth shining folds in large glossy curls. Her rich red lips are parted with a malicious smile, half playful, half coquettish, that is inexpressibly provoking and attractive; while although the question as to whether she does really *rouge* or not, is still undecided, her blue eyes seem positively to dance and sparkle in the candle-light. Her voice is low and soft and silvery; all she says racy, humorous,

full of meaning, and to the point. Poor Victor de Rohan!

He, too, is at first in unusually high sprits; his courteous, well-bred manner is livelier than his wont, but the deferential air with which he reponds to his neighbour's gay remarks is dashed by a shade of sarcasm, and I, who know him so well, can detect a tone of bitter irony in his voice, can trace some acute inward pang that ever and anon convulses for a moment his frank, handsome features. I am sure he is ill at ease, and dissatisfied with himself. I observe, too, that, though he scarcely touches the contents of his plate, his glass is filled again and again to the brim, and he quaffs off his wine with the eager feverish thirst of one who seeks to drown reflection and remorse in the Lethean draught. Worst sign of all, and one which never fails, to denote mental suffering, his spirits fall in proportion to his potations, and that which in a well-balanced nature "makes glad the heart of man," seems but to clog the wings of Victor's fancy, and to sink him deeper and deeper in despondency. Ere long he becomes pale, silent, almost morose, and the charming Princess has all the conversation to herself.

But one individual in the party attends thoroughly to the business in hand. Without doubt, for the time being he has the best of it. Prince Vocqsal possesses an excellent appetite, a digestion, as he says himself, that, like his conscience, can carry a great weight and be all the better for it; a faultless judgment in wine, and a tendency to enjoy

the pleasures of the table, enhanced, if possible, by the occasional fit of gout with which this indulgence must unfortunately be purchased. Fancy-free is the Prince, and troubled neither by memories of the past, misgivings for the present, nor anxieties for the future. Many such passive natures there are — we see them every day. Men who are content to take the world as it is, and, like the ox in his pasture, browse, and bask, and ruminate, and never wish to overleap the boundary that forbids them to wander in the flowery meadow beyond. And yet it may be that these too have once bathed in the forbidden stream, the lava-stream that scorches and sears where it touches; it may be that the heart we deem so hard, so callous, has been welded in the fire, and beaten on the anvil, till it has assumed the consistency of steel. It winced and quivered once, perhaps nearly broke, and now it can bid defiance even to the memory of pain. Who knows? who can tell his neighbour's history, or guess his neighbour's thoughts? who can read the truth, even in the depth of those eyes that look the fondest into his own? Well, there is One that knows all secrets, and He will judge, but not as man judges.

So Prince Vocqsal thinks not of the days that are past, the hearts he has broken, the friends he has lost, the duels he has fought, the money he has squandered, the chances he has thrown away; or, if he does allow his mind to dwell for an instant on such trifles, it is with a sort of dreamy satisfaction at the quantity of enjoyment he has squeezed out of life, tinged with a vague regret that so much of it

is over. Why, it was but to-day that, as he dressed for dinner, he apostrophized the grimacing image in his looking-glass, — "Courage, *mon gaillard*," muttered the Prince, certainly not to his valet, who was tightening his waistbelt, "courage! you are worth a good many of the young ones still, and your appetite is as good as it was at sixteen!"

He is splendid now, though somewhat apoplectic. His wig curls over his magnificent head in hyacinthine luxuriance, his dyed whiskers and mustache blush purple in the candlelight; his neckcloth is tied somewhat too tight, and seems to have forced more than a wholesome quantity of blood into his face and eyes, but its whiteness is dazzling, and the diamond studs beneath it are of extraordinary brilliance nor does his waistbelt, though it defies repletion, modify in any great degree the goodly outline of the corpulent person it enfolds. Altogether he is a very jolly-looking old gentleman, and the only one of the party that seems for the nonce to be "the right man in the right place."

Constance listens to him with a weary, abstracted air; perhaps she has heard that story about the bear and the waterfall once or twice before, perhaps she does not hear it now, but she bends her head courteously towards him, and looks kindly at him from out of her deep, sad eyes.

"Champagne, if you please," says the Prince, interrupting the thread of his narrative, by holding up his glass to be replenished; "and so, Madame, the bear and I were *vis-à-vis* at about ten paces

apart, and my rifle was empty. The last shot had taken effect through his lungs, and he coughed and held his paw to the pit of his stomach, so like a Christian with a cold, that, even in my very precarious position, I could not help laughing outright. Ten paces is a short distance, Madame, a very short distance, when your antagonist feels himself thoroughly aggrieved, and advances upon you with a red, lurid eye, and a short angry growl. I turned and looked behind me for a run — I was always a good runner," remarks the Prince, with a downward glance of satisfaction, the absurdity of which, I am pained to see, does not even call a smile to his listener's pale face — "but it was no question of running here, for the waterfall was leaping and foaming forty feet deep below, and the trees were so thick on either side, that escape by a flank movement was impossible. It was the very spot, Victor, where I killed the woodcocks right and left the morning you disappointed me so shamefully, and left me to have all the sport to myself." — Victor bows courteously, drinks her husband's health, and glances at the Princess with a bitter smile. — "The very spot where I hope you will place me to-morrow at your grand *chasse*. Peste! 'tis strange how passionately fond I still am of the chase. Well, Madame, indecision is not usually my weakness, but before I could make up my mind what to do, the bear was upon me. In an instant he embraced me with his huge hairy arms, and I felt his hot breath against my very face. My rifle was broken short off by the stock, and I heard my watch crack in my waistcoat-

pocket. I thought it was my ribs. I have seen your wrestlers in England, Madame, and I have once assisted in your country at an exhibition of "*The Box*," but such an encounter as I now had to sustain was more terrible than anything I ever witnessed fought out fairly between man and man. Fortunately a ball through the back part of the head, and another through the lungs, had somewhat diminished the natural force of my adversary, or I must have succumbed; and by a great exertion of strength on my part, I managed to liberate one hand and make a grasp for my hunting-knife. Horror! it had fallen from the sheath, but by the mercy of Heaven and the blessing of St. Hubert, it had caught in my boot, and I never felt before how dear life was as when I touched the buckhorn handle of my last friend; three, four times in succession I buried the long keen blade in the bear's side; at each thrust he gave a quick, convulsive sob, but he strained me tighter and tighter to his body, till I thought my very bloodvessels would burst with the fearful pressure. At last we fell, and rolled over and over towards the waterfall. In the hasty glance I had previously cast behind me, I had remarked a dead fir tree that stood within a yard or so of the precipice; I remember the thought had darted through my mind, that if I could reach it I might be safe, and the reflection as instantaneously followed, that a bear was a better climber than a Hungarian. Never shall I forget my sensations when, in our last revolution, I caught a climpse of that naked tree. I shut my eyes then, for I knew it was all over, but I gave him one more stab, and

a hearty one, with my hunting-knife. Splash! we reached the water together, and went down like a couple of stones, down, down to the very bottom, but fortunately it was the deepest part of the pool, and we unclosed our embrace the instant we touched the surface — the bear, I believe, was dead before he got there, and I thought myself fortunate in being able to swim ashore, whilst the brown body of my late antagonist went tumbling and whirling down the foaming torrent below. I recovered his skin, Madame, to make a cover for my arm-chair, but I have never been fond of water since. Give me a glass of Tokay, if you please."

"And did you sustain no further harm from your encounter?" asked Constance, rousing herself from her abstraction with an effort, and bending politely towards the Prince, who was drinking his Tokay with immense satisfaction.

"Only the marks of his claws on my shoulder," replied he, smacking his lips after his draught. "I have got them there to this day. Is it not so, Rose?" he added, appealing to his wife with a hearty laugh.

She turned her head away without condescending to notice him. Victor bit his lip with a gesture of impatience, and the Countess, rising slowly and gracefully, gave her hand to the Prince to lead her back to the drawing-room, whither we all followed in the same order as that in which we had proceeded to dinner.

"Do you not feel like a wounded man, once more?" observed Valérie, gaily, to me, as I stood,

coffee-cup in hand, with my back to the fireplace, like a true Englishman. "Is it not all exactly as you left it? the easiest arm-chair and my eternal embroidery-frame, and your own sofa where you used to lie so wonderfully patient, and look out of window at the sunset. Constance has established herself there now, and considers it her peculiar property. Oh, Vere (I shall always call you Vere), is she not charming? I am so fond of her!"

Slow torture! but never mind, it is but for to-night — this experiment must never be repeated. Go on, Countess Valérie, happy, unconscious executioner.

"You English people are delightful, when one knows you well, although at first you are so cold and undemonstrative. Now, Constance, though she is so quiet and melancholy-looking, though she never laughs, and rarely smiles, has the energy and the activity of a dozen women when it is a question of doing good. You have no idea of what she is here amongst our own people. They worship the very ground she walks on — they call her 'the good angel of Edeldorf.' But she over-exerts herself; she is not strong: she looks ill, very ill. Vere, do you not think so?"

For the first time since we entered the drawing-room I glanced in the direction of the Countess de Rohan, but her face was turned from me; she was still occupied with Prince Vocqsal, who, old enough to appreciate the value of a good listener, was devoting himself entirely to her amusement. No, I could not see the pale, well-known face, but the light

streamed off her jet-black hair, and memory probed me to the quick as its shining masses recalled the wet, heavy locks of one whose life I saved in Beverley Mere.

"Come and play the march in the *Honjady*," said Ropsley, leading his *fiancée* gaily off to the pianoforte. "*On revient toujours à ses premiers amours*, but I really cannot allow you to flirt with Egerton any more," he added with a smile of such thorough confidence and affection in his promised bride as altered the whole expression of his countenance, and lit it up with a beauty I had never before imagined it to possess.

"Not *that*," she answered, looking anxiously round, "but 'Cheer, boys! cheer!' as often as you like, now we have got you back again." And they walked away together, a happy, handsome pair as one should wish to see.

I could not have borne it much longer. I gasped for solitude as a man half-stifled gasps for air. With an affectation of leisurely indifference, I strolled into the adjoining billiard-room. I passed close to the Countess, but she never turned her head, so engrossed was she with the conversation of Prince Vocqsal. I walked on through the spacious conservatory. I even stopped to examine an exotic as I passed. At length I reached a balcony in which that structure terminated, and sinking into a chair that stood in one corner, out of sight and interruption, I leaned my forehead against the cold iron railing, and prayed for fortitude and resignation to my lot.

The fresh night air cooled and composed me. A

bright moonlight flickered and glistened over the park. The tones of Valérie's pianoforte, softened by distance, stole sadly yet soothingly on my ear. The autumn breeze, hushed to a whisper, seemed to breathe of peace and consolation. I felt that the strength I had asked would be given; that though the fight was not yet over, it would be won at last; that although, alas! the sacrifice was still to be offered, I should have power to make it, and the higher the cost, the holier, the more acceptable it would be. More than once the Devil's sophistry prompted me to repine; more than once I groaned aloud to think that *she*, too, was sacrificed unworthily, that *her* happiness, like my own, was lost beyond recall. "Oh," I thought, in the bitterness of my agony, "I could have given her up to one that *loved* her, I could have rejoiced in her welfare, and forgotten *myself* in the certainty of her happiness. I could have blessed him thankfully for his care and tenderness towards that transplanted flower, and lived on contented, if not happy, to think that I had not offered up my own broken heart in vain; but to see her neglected and pining — her dignity insulted — her rights trampled on — another, immeasurably her inferior, filling the place in her husband's affections to which she had an undoubted right. Victor! Victor! you were my earliest friend, and yet I can almost *curse* you from my soul!"

But soon my better nature triumphed; I saw the path of duty plain before me, I determined to follow it, and struggle on, at whatever cost. I had lived for her all my life. I would live for her still. Per-

haps when I became an old grey man she would know it; perhaps — never in this life — perhaps she might bless me for it in another; but it should be done! Could I but make a certainty of Victor's *liaison* with the Princess, could I but obtain *a right* to speak to him on the subject! I would make him one last appeal that should *force* him back to his duty. I would, if necessary, tell him the whole truth, and shame him by my own sacrifice into the right path. I felt a giant's strength and a martyr's constancy; once more I leaned my head upon the cold iron rail, and the opportunity that I asked for seemed to come when I least expected it.

In such a mood as I then was, a man takes no note of time: I could not tell how long I had been sitting there in the solemn peaceful night, it might have been minutes, it might have been hours, but at length the click of billiard-balls, which had been hitherto audible in the adjoining apartment, ceased altogether, a man's step and the rustle of a lady's dress were heard in the conservatory, and when they reached within six paces of me, Victor placed a chair for Princesse Vocqsal under the spreading branches of a brilliant azalea, and seated himself at her side. She dropped her bracelet on the smooth tessellated floor as she sat down; he picked it up and clasped it on her arm: as he did so I caught a glimpse of his face: he was deadly pale, and as he raised his eyes to hers, their wild mournful appealing glance reminded me of poor Bold's last look when he died licking my hand. The Princess, on the contrary, shone if possible more brilliant than ever; there was a

settled flush, as of triumph, on her cheek, and her whole countenance bore an impress of determined, uncompromising resolution, which I had already remarked as no uncommon expression on those lovely features.

My first impulse was to confront them at once, and take my departure; but I have already said I suffered from constitutional shyness to a great degree, and I was unwilling to face even my old friend with such traces of strong emotion as I knew must be visible on my exterior. I was most unwilling to play the eavesdropper. I felt that, as a man of honour, I was inexcusable in not instantly apprising them of my presence; yet some strange, inexplicable fascination that I could not resist, seemed to force me to remain where I was, unnoticed and unsuspected. Ere they had spoken three words I was in possession of the whole truth, that truth which a few minutes earlier I had been so anxious to ascertain. I do not attempt to excuse my conduct, I am aware that it admits of no palliation, that no one can be guilty of an act of espial and still remain a *gentleman*; but I state the fact as it occurred, and can only offer in extenuation the fever of morbid excitement into which I had worked myself, and my unwavering resolution to save Victor, in spite of his own infatuation, for her sake in whose behalf I did not hesitate thus to sacrifice even my honour.

"Anything but *that*, Rose, my adored Rose; anything but that," pleaded the Count; and his voice came thick and hoarse, whilst his features worked convulsively with the violence of his feelings. "Think

of what I have been to you, think of all my devotion, all my self-denial. You cannot doubt me: it is impossible; you cannot mistrust me *now*; but, as you have a woman's heart, ask me for anything but *that*."

She was clasping and unclasping the bracelet he had placed upon her arm, her head drooped over the jewel, but she raised her soft lustrous eyes to his, and with a witching, maddening glance, of which he knew too well the power, murmured —

"Give it me, Victor, *dear* Victor! you have never refused me anything since I have known you."

"Nor would I now, were it anything that is in my power to give," he burst out hurriedly, and in accents of almost childish impatience; "I tell you, that for your sake I would cast everything to the winds — fortune, friends, home, country, life itself. Drop by drop, you should have the best blood in my body, and I would thank you and bless you for accepting it; but this is more than all, Rose — this is my honour. Could you bear to see me a disgraced and branded man? could you bear to feel that I *deserved* to have my arms reversed and my name scouted? Could you care for me if it were so? Oh, Rose, you have never loved me if you ask for this!"

"Perhaps you are right," she answered, coldly, "perhaps I never did. You have often told me I am very hard-hearted — Victor," she added, after a pause, with a sudden change of manner, and another of those soft fond looks that made such wild work with her victim — "do you think I would ask

a man I did not care for to make such a sacrifice? Oh, Victor! you little know a woman's heart — you have cruelly mistaken mine."

The fond eyes filled with tears as she spoke. Victor was doomed. I knew it from that moment. He scarcely made an effort to save himself now.

"And you ask for this as a last proof of my devotion. You are not satisfied yet. It is not enough that I have given you the whole happiness of my life, you must have that life itself as well — nay, even that is too little," he added, with bitter emphasis, "I must offer up the unstained honour of the De Rohans in addition to all!"

Another of those speaking, thrilling glances. Oh, the old, old story. Samson and Dalilah — Hercules and Omphale — Antony and Cleopatra, on the ruins of an empire — or plain Jack and Gill at the fair. Man's weakness is woman's opportunity and so the world goes on.

"Victor," she said, "it is for *my* sake."

The colour mounted in his cheek, and he rose to his feet like a man. The old look I had missed all the evening on his face came back once more, the old look that reminded me of shouting squadrons by the Danube, and a dash to the front with Ali Mesrour and brave Iskender Bey. His blood was up, and his lance in rest now, stop him who can!

"So be it," he said, calmly and distinctly, but with his teeth clenched and his nostril dilated, like that of a thorough-bred horse after a gallop. "So be it! and never forget, Rose, in the long dark future, never forget that it was for your sake: and

now listen to me. I betray my own and my father's friends, I complete an act of treachery such as is yet unknown in the annals of my country, such as her history shall curse for its baseness till the end of time. I devote to ruin and death a score of the noblest families, a score of the proudest heads in Hungary. I stain my father's shield, I break my own oaths. Life, and honour, and all, I cast away at one throw, and Rose, it is for your sake!"

She was weeping now — weeping convulsively, with her face buried in her hands; but he heeded it not, and went on —

"All this I am willing to do, Rose, because I love you; but mark the consequence. As surely as I deliver you this list" — he drew a paper from his breast as he spoke — "so surely I proclaim my treachery to the world, so surely I give myself over to the authorities, so surely I march up to the scaffold at the head of that devoted band who were once my friends, and though they think it shame that their blood should soak the same planks as mine, though they turn from me in disgust, even on the verge of another world, so surely will I die amongst them as boldly, as unflinchingly, as the most stainless patriot of them all!"

"No, no," she sobbed out; "never, never; do you think I have no feeling? do you think I have no heart? I have provided for your safety long ago. I have got your free pardon in a written promise, your life and fortune are secure, your share in the discovery will never be made known. Victor, do you think I have not taken care of *you*?"

Even then his whole countenance softened. This man, whose proud spirit she had so often trampled on, whose kind heart she had so often wounded, from whom she asked so much — ay, so much as his bitterest enemy would have shrunk from taking — was ready and willing to give her all, and to bless the very hand that smote him to the death. He spoke gently and caressingly now. He bent over her chair, and looked down at her with kind, sad eyes.

"Not so," he said, "Rose, not so. I am glad you did not sacrifice me. I like to think you would have saved me if you could; but I cannot accept the terms. To-morrow is my birthday, Rose. It is St. Hubert's day, and I have a grand *chasse* here, as you know. Many of these devoted gentlemen will be at Edeldorf to-morrow. Give us at least that one day. In twenty-four hours from this time you can forward your information to Vienna; after that, you and I will meet no more on earth. Rose, dear Rose," he murmured, as he placed the paper in her hand, "it is the *last* present I shall give you — make the most of it!"

Why did she meddle with politics, woman as she was in her heart of hearts? What had she to do with Monsieur Stein, and Government intrigues, and a secret police, and all that complicated machinery which is worked by gold alone, and in which the feelings count for nothing? State information might go to other quarters; fortunes be made on the Bourse by other speculators; her husband wait for his appointment till doomsday, and the attainder remain

unreversed on the estates in the Banat as long as the Danube flowed downward from its source; — what cared Princesse Vocqsal? She looked up, smiling through her tears, like a wet rose in the sunshine. She took the list from his hand; once, twice, she pressed the paper to her lips, then tore it in a thousand fragments, and scattered them abroad over the shining floor of the conservatory, to mingle with the shed blossoms of the azalea, to be swept away with the decayed petals of the camellias, to be whirled hither and thither by the breeze of morning to oblivion, but to rise up between her and him who now stood somewhat aghast by her side, never, never more!

She put her hand almost timidly in his. "Victor," she said, in a soft, low voice, "you have conquered. I am yours now in defiance of all. Oh, Victor, Victor, you do indeed love me!"

He looked startled, scared, almost as if he could not understand her; he shook in every limb, whilst she was composed and even dignified.

"Yes," she said, rising from her chair, "I will trifle with you no longer now. I know what I do; I see the gulf into which I plunge. Misery, ruin, and crime are before me; but I fear *nothing*. Victor de Rohan! when I leave Edeldorf, I leave it with you, and with you I remain for ever!"

They walked out of the conservatory side by side. I do not think they exchanged another word; and I remained stunned, motionless, stupified, like a man who wakes from some ghastly and bewildering dream.

The striking of the Castle clock roused me to consciousness — to a conviction of the importance of time, and the necessity for immediate action. It was now midnight. Early to-morrow we should all be on the alert for the grand *battue* on the Waldenberg, for which preparations had been making for several days. I should scarcely have an opportunity of speaking in private to my friend, and the day after it might be too late. No, to-night I must see Victor before he slept; to-night I must warn him from the abyss into which he was about to fall, confess to him the dishonourable act of which I had been guilty, sustain his anger and contempt as I best might, and plead her cause whom I must never see again. More than once — I will not deny it — a rebellious feeling rose in my heart. Why are these things so? Why is she not mine whom I have loved so many dark and lonely years? Why must Victor, after the proof he has given to-night of more than human devotion, never be happy with her for whose sake he did not hesitate to offer up all that was far dearer to him than life? But I had long learnt the true lesson, that "Whatever is, is right" — that Providence sees not with our eyes, nor judges with our judgment; and that we must not presume to question, much less dare to repine. I hurried through the billiard-room towards Victor's apartments; I had then to traverse the drawing-room, and a little snug retreat in which it used to be our custom to finish the evening with a social cigar, and to which, in former days, Valérie was sometimes to be prevailed upon to bring her

work. Here I found Ropsley and Prince Vocqsal comfortably established, apparently with no idea of going to bed yet for hours. They had never met till to-day, but seemed to suit each other admirably, all that was ludicrous in the Prince's character and conversation affording a ceaseless fund of amusement to the Guardsman; while the latter's high prowess as a sportsman, and intimate acquaintance with the turf, rendered him an object of great interest and admiration to the enthusiastic Hungarian. Ropsley, with restored health, and his ladye-love under the same roof with him, was in the highest spirits, and no wonder.

"Don't run away, Vere," said he, catching me by the arm as I passed behind his chair; "it's quite early yet. Have a quiet weed before turning in." Adding, in an amused whisper, "he's an immense trump, this! That's his third cigar and his fourth tumbler of brandy and soda since we came here; and he's telling me now how he once pinked a fellow in the Bois de Boulogne for wearing revolutionary shirt-buttons. In English, too, my dear fellow; it's as good as a play."

Even as he spoke I heard a door shut in the passage, and I hurried away, leaving the new acquaintances delighted with each other's society.

In the gallery I met Victor's French valet with a bundle of clothes over his arm, humming an air from a French opera. "Could I see the Count?" "Alas! I was a few seconds too late!" The valet "was in despair — he was desolate — it was impossible. Monsieur had even now retired to the

apartments of Madame!" "I must do it to-morrow," thought I; "perhaps I may find an opportunity when the *chasse* is over." And I went to bed with a heavy, aching heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Gipsy's Dream.

It is a calm, clear night; a narrow crescent moon, low down on the horizon, scarcely dims the radiance of those myriads of stars which gem the entire sky. It is such a night as would have been chosen by the Chaldean to read his destiny on the glittering page above his head — such a night as compels us perforce to think of other matters than what we shall eat and what we shall drink — as brings startingly to our minds the unsolved question, Which is Reality — the Material of to-day or the Ideal of to-morrow? Not a cloud obscures the diamond-sprinkled vault above; not a tree, not an undulation varies the level plain, extending far and wide below. Dim and indistinct, its monotonous surface presents a vague idea of boundless space, the vastness of which is enhanced by the silence that reigns around. Not a breath of air is stirring, not a sound is heard save the lazy plash and ripple of the Danube, as it steals away under its low swampy banks, sluggish and unseen. Yet there is life breathing in the midst of this apparent solitude: human hearts beating, with all their hopes and fears, and joys and sorrows, in this isolated spot. Even here beauty pillows her head on the broad chest of

strength; infancy nestles to the refuge of a mother's bosom; weary labour lies prone and helpless, with relaxed muscles and limp, powerless limbs; youth dreams of love, and age of youth; and sleep spreads her welcome mantle over the hardy tribe who have chosen this wild waste of Hungary for their lair.

It is long past midnight; their fires have been out for hours; their tents are low and dusky, in colour almost like the plain on which they are pitched; you might ride within twenty yards of it, and never know you were near a gipsy's encampment, for the Zingynie loves to be unobserved and secret in his movements; to wander here and there, with no man's leave and no man's knowledge; to come and go unmarked and untrammelled as the wind that lifts the elf-locks from his brow. So he sleeps equally well under the coarse canvas of a tent or the roof of a clear cold sky; he pays no rent, he owns no master, and he believes that, of all the inhabitants of earth, he alone is free.

And now a figure rises from amongst the low dusky tents, and comes out into the light of the clear starry sky, and looks steadfastly towards the east as if watching for the dawn, and turns a fevered cheek to the soft night air, as yet not fresh and cold enough to promise the approach of day. It is the figure of a woman past the prime of life, nay, verging upon age, but who retains all the majesty and some remains of the beauty which distinguished

her in bygone days; who even now owns none of the decay of strength or infirmity of gait which usually accompanies the advance of years, but who looks, as she always did, born to command, and not yet incapable of enforcing obedience to her behests. It is none other than the Zingynie Queen who prophesied the future of Victor de Rohan when he was a laughing golden-haired child; whose mind is anxious and ill at ease for the sake of her darling now, and who draws her hood further over her head, binds her crimson handkerchief tighter on her brows, and looks once more with anxious glance towards the sky, as she mutters —

“Three hours to dawn, and then six more till noon; and once, girl, thou wast light-footed and untiring as the deer. Girl!” and she laughs a short, bitter laugh. “Well, no matter — girl, or woman, or aged crone, the heart is always the same; and I will save him — save him, for the sake of the strong arm and the fair, frank face that have been mouldering for years in the grave!”

She is wandering back into the past now. Vivid and real as though it had happened but yesterday, she recalls a scene that took place many a long year ago in the streets of Pesth. She was a young, light-hearted maiden then: the acknowledged beauty of her tribe, the swiftest runner, the most invincible pedestrian to be found of either sex in the bounds of Hungary. Not a little proud was she of both advantages, and it was hard to say on which she plumed herself the most. In those days, as in many

others of its unhappy history, that country was seething with internal faction and discontent; and the Zingynies, from their wandering habits, powers of endurance, and immunity from suspicion, were constantly chosen as the bearers of important despatches and the means of communication between distant conspirators, whilst they were themselves kept in utter ignorance of the valuable secrets with which they were entrusted.

The gipsy maiden had come up to Pesth on an errand of this nature all the way from the Banat. Many a flat and weary mile it is; yet though she had rested but seldom and partaken sparingly of food, the girl's eye was as bright, her step as elastic, and her beauty as dazzling as when she first started on her journey. In such a town as the capital of Hungary she could not fail to attract attention and remark. Ere long, while she herself was feasting her curiosity with innocent delight on the splendours of the shop windows and the many wonders of a city so interesting to this denizen of the wilderness, she found herself the centre of a gazing and somewhat turbulent crowd, whose murmurs, of approbation at her beauty were not unmingled with jeers and even threats of a more formidable description. Swabes were they mostly, and Croatians, who formed this disorderly mob; for your true Hungarian, of whatever rank, is far too much of a gentleman to mix himself up with a street riot or vulgar brawl, save upon the greatest provocation. There had been discontent brewing for days amongst

the lowest classes; the price of bread had gone up, and there was a strong feeling abroad against the landholders, and what we should term in England the agricultural interest generally.

The mob soon recognised in the Zingynie maiden one of the messengers of their enemies. From taunts and foul abuse they proceeded to overt acts of insolence; and the handsome high-spirited girl found herself at bay, surrounded by savage faces, and rude, insulting tongues. Soon they began to hustle and maltreat her, with cries of "Down with the gipsy!" — "Down with the go-between of our tyrants!" — "To the stake with the fortune-teller!" — "To the Danube with the witch!" Imprudently she drew her long knife and flashed it in the faces of the foremost; for an instant the curs gave back, and any immunity that her youth and beauty might have won from her oppressors was, by this ill-judged action, turned to more determined violence and aggression. Already they had pinioned her arms, and were dragging her towards the river — already she had given herself up for lost, when a lane was seen opening in the crowd, and a tall powerful man came striding to her rescue, and as he elbowed and jostled his way through her tormentors, asked authoritatively, "What was the matter, and how they could dare thus to maltreat a young and beautiful girl?"

"She is a witch!" replied one ruffian who had hold of her by the wrist, "and we are going to put

her in the Danube. *You* are an aristocrat, and you shall keep her company!"

"Shall I?" replied the stranger, and in another instant the insolent Swabe, spitting out a mouthful of blood and a couple of front teeth, measured his length upon the pavement. The crowd began to retire, but they were fierce and excited, and their numbers gave them confidence. A comrade of the fallen ruffian advanced upon the champion with bared knife and scowling brow. Another of those straight left-handers, delivered flush from the shoulder, and he lay prostrate by his friend. The stranger had evidently received his fighting education in England, and the instructions of science had not been thrown away on that magnificent frame and those heavy muscular limbs. It was indeed no other than the last Count de Rohan, Victor's father, the associate of the Prince of Wales, the friend of Philip Egerton and Sir Harry Beverley: lastly, what was more to the purpose at the present juncture, the pupil of the famous Jackson. Ere long the intimidated mob ceased to interfere, and the nobleman, conducting the frightened gipsy girl with as much deference as though she had been his equal in rank and station, never left her till he had placed her in his own carriage, and forwarded her, with three or four stout hussars as her escort, half-way back on her homeward journey. There is a little bit of romance safe locked up and hidden away somewhere in a corner of every woman's heart. What was the great Count de Rohan to the vagabond Zingynie

maiden but a "bright particular star," from which she must always remain at a hopeless and immeasurable distance? Yet even now, though her hair is grey and her brow is wrinkled — though she has loved and suffered, and borne children and buried them, and wept and laughed, and hoped and feared, and gone the round of earthly joys and earthly sorrows — the colour mounts to her withered cheek, and the blood gathers warmer round her heart, when she thinks of that frank, handsome face, with its noble features and its fearless eyes, and the kindly smile with which it bade her farewell. Therefore has she always felt a thrilling interest in all that appertains to the Count de Rohan; therefore has she mourned him with many a secret tear and many a hidden pang; therefore has she loved and cherished and watched over his child as though he had been her own, exhausting all her skill and all her superstition to prognosticate for him a happy future — to ward off from him the evil that she reads too surely in the stars will be his lot.

Once she has warned him — twice she has warned him — will the third time be too late? She shudders to think how she has neglected him. To-morrow — nay, to-day (for it is long past midnight), is the anniversary of his birth, the festival of St. Hubert, and she would have passed it over unnoticed, would have forgotten it, but for last night's dream. The coming morning strikes chill to her very marrow as she thinks what a strange, wild, eyrie dream it was.

She dreamed that she was sitting by the Danube;

far, far away down yonder, where its broad yellow flood, washing the flat, fertile shores of Moldavia, sweeps onward to the Black Sea, calm, strong, and not to be stemmed by mortal hand, like the stream of Time — like the course of destiny.

Strange voices whispered in her ears, mingled with the splash and ripple of the mighty river; voices that she could not recognise, yet of which she felt an uncomfortable consciousness that she had heard them before. It was early morning, the raw mist curled over the waters, and her hair — how was this? — once more black and glossy as the raven's wing, was dank and dripping with dew. There was a babe, too, in her lap, and she folded the child tighter to her bosom for warmth and comfort. It nestled and smiled up in her face, though it was none of hers; no gipsy blood could be traced in those blue eyes and golden locks; it was De Rohan's heir: how came it here? She asked the question aloud, and the voices answered all at once and confusedly, with an indistinct and rushing sound. Then they were silent, and the river plashed on.

She felt very lonely, and sang to the child for company a merry gipsy song. And the babe laughed and crowed, and leapt in her arms with delight, and glided from her hands; and the waters closed over its golden head, and it was gone. Then the voices moaned and shrieked, still far away, dim and indistinct; and the river plashed sullenly on.

But the child rose from the waves, and looked

back and smiled, and shook the drops from its golden hair, and struck out fearlessly down the stream. It had changed, too, and the blue eyes and the clustering curls belonged to a strong, well-grown young man. Still she watched the form eagerly as it swam, for something reminded her of one she used to think the type of manhood years and years ago. The voices warned her now to rise and hasten, but the river plashed on sullenly as before.

She must run to yonder point, marked as it is by a white wooden cross. Far beyond it the stream whirls and seethes in a deep eddying pool, and she must guide the swimmer to the cross, and help him to land there, or he will be lost — De Rohans child will be drowned in her sight. How does she know it is called St. Hubert's Cross? Did the voices tell her? They are whispering still, but fainter and farther off. And the river plashes on sullenly, but with a murmur of fierce impatience now.

She waves frantically to the swimmer, and would fain shout to him aloud, but she cannot speak; her shawl is wound so tight round her bosom that it stops her voice, and her fingers struggle in vain amongst the knots. Why will he not turn his head towards her? — why does he dash so eagerly on? proud of his strength, proud of his mastery over the flood — his father's own son. Ah! he hears it too. Far away, past the cross and the whirl-pool, down yonder on that sunny patch of sand, sits a mermaid, combing her long bright locks with a golden comb.

She sings a sweet, wild, unearthly melody — it would woo a saint to perdition! Hark! how it mingles with the rushing voices and the plash of the angry river!

The sand is deep and quick along the water's edge; she sinks in it up to the ankles, weights seem to clog her limbs, and hands she cannot see to hold her back; breathless she struggles on to reach the cross, for there is a bend in the river there, and he will surely see her, and turn from the song of the mermaid, and she will drag him ashore and rescue him from his fate. The voices are close in her ears now, and the river plashing at her very feet.

So she reaches the cross at last, and with frantic gestures — for she is still speechless — waves him to the shore. But the mermaid beckons him wildly on, and the stream, seizing him like a prey, whirls him downwards eddying past the cross, and it is too late now. See! he turns his head at last, but to show the pale, rigid features of a corpse.

The voices come rushing like a hurricane in her ears; the plash of the river rises to a mighty roar. Wildly the mermaid tosses her white arms above her head, and laughs, and shrieks, and laughs again, in ghastly triumph. The dreamer has found her voice now, and in a frenzy of despair and horror she screams aloud.

With that scream she awoke, and left her tent for the cool night air, and counted the hours till noon; and so, with no more preparation, she betook

herself to her journey, goaded with the thought that there might be time even yet.

It is sunrise now; a thousand gladsome tokens of life and happiness wake with the morning light. The dew sparkles on herb and autumn flower; the lark rises into the bright, pure heaven; herds of oxen file slowly across the plain. Hope is ever strong in the morning; and the gipsy's step is more elastic, her brow grows clearer and her eye brighter, as she calculates the distance she has already traversed, and the miles that yet lie between her and the woods and towers of Edeldorf. A third of the journey is already accomplished; in another hour the summit of the Waldenberg ought to be visible, peering above the plain. She has often trod the same path before, but never in such haste as now.

A tall Hungarian peasant meets her, and recognising her at once for a gipsy, doffs his hat, and bids her "Good morrow, mother!" and craves a blessing from the Zingynie, for though he has no silver, he has a paper florin or two in his pocket, and he would fain have his fortune told, and so while away an hour of his long, solitary day only just begun. With flashing eyes and impatient gestures she bans him as she passes, for she cannot brook even an instant's delay, and the curse springs with angry haste to her lips. He crosses himself in terror as he walks on, and all day he will be less comfortable that he encountered a gipsy's malison at sunrise.

A village lies in her road; many a long mile before she reaches it, the white houses and tall acacias seem to mock her with their distinct outlines and their apparent proximity — will it *never* be any nearer? but she arrives there at last, and although she is weary and footsore, she dreams not of an instant's delay for refreshment or repose. Flocks of geese hiss and cackle at her as she passes: from the last cottage in the street a little child runs merrily out with a plaything in its hand, it totters and falls just across her path; as she replaces it on its legs she kisses it, that dark old woman, on its bright young brow. It is a good omen, and she feels easier about her heart now; she walks on with renewed strength and elasticity — she will win yet.

Another hour, the sun is high in the heavens, and, autumn though it be, the heat scorches her head through her crimson handkerchief and her thick grey hair. Ah! she is old now; though the spirit may last for ever, the limbs fail in despite of it; what if she has miscalculated her strength? what if she cannot reach the goal after all? Courage! the crest of the Waldenberg shows high above the plain. Edeldorf, as she knows well, lies between her and that rugged range of hills, but she quails to think from what a distance the waving woods of De Rohan's home should be visible, and that they are not yet in sight. Her limbs are very weary, and the cold drops stand on her brow, for she is faint and sick at heart. Gallantly she struggles on.

It is a tameless race, that ancient nation of which

we know not the origin, and speculate on the destiny in vain. It transmits to its descendants a strain of blood which seems as invincible by physical fatigue as it is averse to moral restraint. Like some wild animal, like some courser of pure Eastern breed, the gipsy gained second strength as she toiled. Three hours after sunrise she was literally fresher and stronger than when she met and cursed the astonished herdsman in the early morning; and as the distance decreased between the traveller and her destination, as the white towers of Edeldorf stood out clearer and clearer in the daylight, glad hope and kindly affection gushed up in her heart, and lame, wearied, exhausted as she was, a thrill of triumph shot through her as she thought she might see her darling in time to warn him even now.

At the lodge-gate she sinks exhausted on a stone. A dashing hussar mounting guard, as befits his office, scans her with an astonished look, and crosses himself more than once with a hurried, inward prayer. He is a bold fellow enough, and would face an Austrian cuirassier or a Russian bayonet as readily and fearlessly as a flask of strong Hungarian wine, but he quails and trembles at the very thought of the Evil Eye.

"The Count! the Count!" gasps out the breathless Zingynie, "is he at the castle? can I see Count Victor?"

"All in good time, mother!" replies he, good-naturedly; "the Count is gone shooting to the Wal-

denberg. The carriages have but just driven by; did you not see them as you came here?"

"And the Count, is he not riding, as is his custom? will he not pass by here as he gallops on to overtake them? Has my boy learnt to forget the saddle, and to neglect the good horse that his father's son should love?"

"Not to-day, mother," answered the hussar. "All the carriages are gone to-day, and the Count sits in the first with a bright, beautiful lady, ah, brighter even than our Countess, and more beautiful, with her red lips and her sunny hair."

All hussars are *connoisseurs* in beauty.

"My boy, my boy," mutters the old woman; and the hussar seeing how ill she looks, produces a flask of his favourite remedy, and insists on her partaking of its contents. It brings the colour back to her cheek, and the blood to her heart.

"And they are gone to the Waldenberg! and I ought to reach it by the mountain-path before them even now. Oh, for one hour of my girlhood! one hour of the speed I once thought so little of! I would give all the rest of my days for that hour now. To the Waldenberg?"

"To the Waldenberg!" answered the hussar, taking the flask (empty) from his lips; but even while he spoke she was gone.

As she followed the path towards the mountain, a large raven flew out of the copse-wood on her left,

and hopped along the track in front of her. Then the gipsy's lips turned ashy-white once more, for she knew she was too late.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Retribution.

CARRIAGE after carriage drove from Edeldorf to the foot of the Waldenberg, and deposited its living freight in a picturesque gorge or cleft of the mountain, where the only road practicable for wheels and axles terminated, and whence the sportsman, however luxurious, must be content to perform the remainder of his journey on foot. A hearty welcome and a sumptuous breakfast at the castle had commenced the day's proceedings; but Madame de Rohan had kept her room on the plea of indisposition, and the only ladies of the party were the Princess and the Countess Valérie. Victor was in unusual spirits, a strange, wild happiness lighted up his eye, and spread a halo over his features; but he was absent and preoccupied at intervals, and his inconsequent answers and air of distraction more than once elicited marks of undisguised astonishment from his guests. The Princess was more subdued in manner than her wont. I watched the two with a painful interest, all the keener that my opportunity had not yet arrived, and that the confidence in my own powers, which had supported me the previous evening, were now rapidly deserting me, as I reflected on the

violence of my friend's fatal attachment, and the character of her who was his destiny. If I should fail in persuading him, as was more than probable, what would be the result? What ought I to do next? I had assumed a fearful responsibility, yet I determined not to shrink from it. Valérie was gay and good-humoured as usual. It had been arranged that the two ladies should accompany the sportsmen to the trysting-place at the foot of the mountain, and then return to the castle. The plan originated with Valérie, who thus enjoyed more of her lover's society. Nor did it meet with the slightest opposition from Victor, who, contrary to his usual custom of riding on horseback to the mountain, starting after all his guests were gone, and then galloping at speed to overtake them, had shown no disinclination to make a fourth in his own barouche, the other three places being occupied by an Austrian grandee and Prince and Princess Vocqsal. Had he adhered to his usual custom, the Zingynie would have met him before he reached the lodge. English thorough-bred horses, harnessed to carriages of Vienna build, none of them being drawn by less than four, make light of distance, and it seemed but a short drive to more than one couple of our party, when we reached the spot at which our day's sport was likely to commence.

A merry, chattering, laughing group we were. On a level piece of greensward, overshadowed by a few gigantic fir-trees, and backed by the bluff rise of the copse-clothed mountain, lounged the little band of gentlemen for whose amusement all the prepara-

tions had been made, whose accuracy of eye and readiness of finger were that day to be tested by the downfall of bear and wolf, deer and wild-boar, not to mention such ignoble game as partridges, woodcocks, quail, and waterfowl, or such inferior vermin as hawk and buzzard, marten and wild-cat, all of which denizens of the wilderness were to be found in plenty on the Waldenberg. A picturesque assemblage it was, consisting as it did of nearly a score of the first noblemen in Hungary — men who bore the impress of their stainless birth not only in chivalry of bearing and frank courtesy of manner, but in the handsome faces and stately frames that had come down to them direct from those mailed ancestors whose boast it used to be that they were the advanced guard of Germany and the very bulwarks of Christendom. As I looked around on their happy, smiling faces, and graceful, energetic forms, my blood ran cold to think how the lightest whisper of one frail woman might bring every one of those noble heads to the block; how, had she indeed been more or less than woman, a cross would even now be attached to every one of those time-honoured names on that fatal list which knows neither pity nor remorse. And when I looked from those unconscious men to the fair arbitress of their fate, with her little French bonnet and coquettish dress, with her heightened colour and glossy hair, I thought, if the history of the world were ever *really* laid bare, what a strange history it would be, and how unworthy we should find had been the motives of some of the noblest actions, how paltry the agency by which

some of the greatest convulsions on record had been effected.

She was fastening Victor's powder-horn more securely to its string, and I remarked that her fingers trembled in the performance of that simple office. She looked wistfully after him, too, as he waved his hat to bid her adieu, and stood up in the carriage to watch our ascending party long after she had started on her homeward journey. She who was generally so proud, so undemonstrative, so careful not to commit herself by word or deed! could it have been a presentiment? I felt angry with her then; alas! alas! my anger had passed away long before the sun went down.

"Help me to place the guns, Vere," said Victor, in his cheerful, affectionate voice, as we toiled together up the mountain-side, and reached the first pass at which it would be necessary to station a sportsman, well armed with rifle and smooth-bore, to be ready for whatever might come. "I can depend upon *you*, for I know your shooting; so I shall put you above the waterfall. Vocqsal and I will take the two corners just below; and if there is an old boar in the Waldenberg, he *must* come to one of us. I expect a famous day's sport, if we manage it well. I used to say '*Vive la guerre*,' Vere — don't you remember? but it's '*Vive la chasse*' now, and has been for a long time with me."

He looked so happy; he was so full of life and spirits, I could not help agreeing with his head forester, a tall, stalwart Hungarian, who followed him about like his shadow, when he muttered, "It does

one good to see the Count when he gets on the mountain. He is like *himself* now."

Meanwhile the beaters, collected from the neighbouring peasantry, and who had been all the previous day gradually contracting the large circle they had made, so as to bring every head of game, and indeed every living thing, from many a mile round, within the range of our fire-arms, might be heard drawing nearer and nearer, their shrill voices and discordant shouts breaking wildly on the silence of the forest, hitherto uninterrupted, save by the soft whisper of the breeze, or the soothing murmur of the distant waterfall. Like the hunter when he hears the note of a hound, and erects his ears, and snorts and trembles with excitement, I could see many of my fellow-sportsmen change colour and fidget upon their posts; for well they knew that long before the beater's cry smites upon the ear, it is time to expect the light-bounding gambol of the deer, the stealthy gallop of the wolf, the awkward advance of the bear, or the blundering rush of the fierce wild boar himself; and as they were keen and experienced sportsmen, heart and soul in the business of the day, their quick glances and eager attitudes showed that each was determined no inattention on his own part should baulk him of his prey.

One by one, Victor placed them in their respective situations, with a jest and a kind word and a cordial smile for each. Many a hearty friend remarked that day how Count de Rohan's voice was gayer, his manner even more fascinating than usual, his whole

bearing more full of energy and happiness and a thorough enjoyment of life.

At last he had placed them all but Ropsley and myself, and there was no time to be lost, for the cry of the beaters came louder and louder on the breeze; and already a scared buzzard or two, shooting rapidly over our heads, showed that our neighbourhood was disturbed, and the game of every description must ere long be on foot.

"Take the Guardsman above the waterfall, Vere, and put him by the old oak-tree," said Victor, fanning his brow with his hat after his exertions. "He can command both the passes from there, and get shooting enough to remind him of Sebastopol. You take the glade at the foot of the bare rock. Keep well under cover. I have seen two boars there already this season. I shall stay here opposite the Prince. Halloa! Vocqsal, where are you?"

"Here!" replied that worthy from the opposite side of the torrent, where he had ensconced himself in a secure and secret nook, commanding right and left an uninterrupted view of two long narrow vistas in the forest, and promising to afford an excellent position for the use of that heavy double-barrelled rifle which he handled with a skill and precision the result of many a year's practice and many a triumphant *coup*.

Unlike the younger sportsmen, Prince Vocqsal's movements were marked by a coolness and confidence which was of itself sufficient to predicate success. He had taken off the resplendent wig which adorned his "imperial front" immediately on the departure of the

ladies, and transferred it to the capacious pockets of a magnificent green velvet shooting-coat, rich in gold embroidery and filagree buttons of the same precious metal. Its place was supplied by a black skull-cap, surmounted by a wide-brimmed, low hat. On the branches of the huge old tree under which he was stationed he had hung his powder-horn, loading-rod, and shooting apparatus generally, in such positions as to ensure replenishing his trusty rifle with the utmost rapidity; and taking a hunting-knife from his belt, he had stuck it, like a Scottish Highlander, in his right boot. Since his famous encounter with the bear at this very spot, the Prince always liked to wear his "best friend," as he called it, in that place. These arrangements being concluded to his own satisfaction, he took a goodly-sized hunting-flask from his pockets, and after a hearty pull at its contents, wiped his mustache, and looked about him with the air of a man who had made himself thoroughly comfortable, and was prepared for any emergency.

"Here I am, Victor," he shouted once more, "established *en factionnaire*. Don't shoot point-blank this way, and keep perfectly quiet after you hear the action has commenced."

Victor laughingly promised compliance, and Ropsley and I betook ourselves, with all the haste we could make, to our respective posts.

It was a steep, though not a long climb, and we had little breath to spare for conversation. Yet it seemed that something more than the exhausting nature of our exercise sealed our lips and checked our free interchange of thought. There was evidently

something on Ropsley's mind; and he, too, appeared aware that there was a burden on mine. It was not till I reached the old oak-tree at which he was to be stationed, and was about to leave him for my own place, that he made the slightest remark. Then he only said —

“Vere, what's the matter with De Rohan? There's something very queer about him to-day; have you not observed it?”

I made some excuse about his keen zest for field-sports, and his hospitable anxiety that his guests should enjoy their share of the day's amusement, but the weight at my heart belied my commonplace words, and when I reached the station assigned me I sank down on the turf, oppressed and crushed by a foreboding of some sudden and dreadful evil.

Soon a shot far off at the extreme edge of the wood warned me that the sport had commenced; another and yet another followed in rapid succession. Branches began to rustle and dry twigs to crack as the larger game moved onwards to the centre of the fatal circle. A fine brown bear came shambling clumsily along within twenty yards of my post; I hit him in the shoulder, and, watching him as he went on to mark if my ball had taken effect, saw him roll over and over down the steep mountain-side, at the same moment that the crack of Ropsley's unerring rifle reached my ear, and a light puff of smoke from the same weapon curled and clung around the fir-trees above his hiding-place. A “Bravo” of encouragement sprang to my lips, but I checked it as it rose, for at that instant an enormous wild-boar emerged

from the covert in front of me; he was trotting along leisurely enough, and with an undignified and ungraceful movement sufficiently ludicrous, but his quick eye must have caught the gleam of my rifle ere I could level it, for he stopped dead short, turned aside with an angry grunt, and dashed furiously down the hill towards the waterfall. "Boar forward!" shouted I, preparing to follow the animal, but in a few moments a shot rang sharply through the woodlands, succeeded instantaneously by another, and then a scream — a long, full, wild, ear-piercing scream! And then the ghastly, awful silence that seems to tell so much. I knew it all along before I reached him, and yet of those few minutes I have no distinct recollection. There was a group of tall figures looking down; a confused mass of rifles, powder-horns, and shooting-gear; a hunting-flask lying white and glittering on the green turf; and an old woman with a bright crimson handkerchief kneeling over *something* on the ground. Every one made way for me to pass, they seemed to treat me with a strange awe-stricken respect — perhaps they knew I was his friend, his oldest friend — and there he lay, the brave, the bright, the beautiful, stretched at his length, stone dead on the cold earth, shot through the heart — by whom? by Prince Vocqsal.

I might have known there was no hope. I had heard such screams before cleaving the roar of battle — death shrieks, that are only forced from man when the leaden messenger has reached the very well-spring of his life. I need not have taken the cold clammy hand in mine, and opened his dress,

and looked with my own eyes upon the blue livid mark. It was all over; there was no more hope for him than for the dead who have lain a hundred years in the grave. This morning he was Count de Rohan; Victor de Rohan my dear old friend. I thought of him a merry blue-eyed child, and then I wept; and my head got better, and so I learned by degrees what had happened.

The boar had dashed down at speed toward the waterfall. He had crossed the range of Count de Rohan's rifle, but the Count — and on this fact his forester laid great stress — the Count had missed his aim, and the animal almost instantaneously turned towards Prince Vocqsal. The Prince's rifle rang clear and true; with his usual cool precision he had waited until the quarry was far past the line of his friend's ambush, and had pulled the trigger in perfect confidence as to the result. He, too, had failed for once in the very act of skill on which he so prided himself. His ball missing the game had struck against the hard knot of an old tree beyond it, and glancing thence almost at right angles, had lodged in poor Victor's heart at the very moment when the exhausted Zingynie, staggering with fatigue, had reached his post, murmuring a few hoarse words of warning, and an entreaty to abandon the sport only for that day. As he turned to greet her, the fatal messenger arrived, and with a convulsive bound into the air, and one loud scream, he fell dead at her feet.

Old Prince Vocqsal seemed utterly stupified. He could neither be prevailed upon to quit the body, nor did it seem possible to make him comprehend

exactly what had happened, and the share which he had himself borne so unwittingly in the dreadful catastrophe. The Zingynie, on the contrary, although pale as death, was composed and almost majestic in her grief. To her it was the fulfilment of a prophecy — the course of that destiny which is not to be checked nor stayed. As she followed the body, with head erect and measured tread, she looked neither to right nor left, but her black eyes flashed with awful brilliance as she fastened the dilated orbs on what had once been Victor de Rohan, and murmured in a low chant words which I now remembered, for the first time, to have heard many years before, words of which I now knew too well the gloomy significance. “Birth and Burial — Birth and Burial — Beware of St. Hubert’s Day!”

So we bore him down to Edeldorf, slowly, solemnly, as we bear one to his last resting-place. Down the beautiful mountain-side, with its russet copsewood, and its fine old oaks, and its brilliant clothing of autumnal beauty; down the white sandy road between the vinegardens, with their light-some foliage and their clusters of blushing grapes, and the buxom peasant-women, and ruddy, happy children, even now so gay and noisy, but hushed and horror-bound as they stopped to look and learn; down across the long level plain, where the flocks were feeding securely, and the cattle stood dreamily, and clouds of insects danced and hovered in the beams of an afternoon sun. Slowly, solemnly, we wound across the plain; slowly, solemnly, we reached the wide park-gates. A crowd of mourners gathering

as we went, followed eager and silent in the rear. Slowly, solemnly, we filed up the long avenue between the acacias, bearing the lord of that proud domain, the last of the De Rohans, to his ancestral home.

Two ladies were walking in the garden as we approached the house; I caught sight of their white dresses before they had themselves perceived our ghastly train. They were Constance De Rohan, and Rose, Princesse Vocqsal.

There was deep and holy mourning, there were bitter scalding tears that night in the Castle of Edeldorf. On the morrow, when the sun rose there was one broken heart within its walls.

CHAPTER XIX.

Væ Victis.

VALÉRIE DE ROHAN is Mrs. Ropsley now; she has dropped the rank of Countess, and prides herself upon the facility with which she has adopted the character of an English matron. She speaks our language, if anything, a little less correctly than when I knew her first; never shakes hands with any of her male acquaintances, and cannot be brought to take a vehement interest in Low Church bishops, parliamentary majorities, or the costly shawls and general delinquencies of her pretty next-door neighbour, whose private history is no concern of yours or mine. In all other respects she is British enough to be own grand-daughter to Boadicea herself. She makes her husband's breakfast punctually at ten; comes down in full morning toilet, dressed for the day, bringing with her an enormous bunch of keys, such as we bachelors scrutinize with mysterious awe, and of the utility of which, inasmuch as they are invariably forgotten and left on the breakfast table, we nourish vague and secret doubts; further, she studies Shakspeare and Burke (not the statesman, but the compiler of that national work which sets forth the pedigrees of peers and baronets, and honourable messieurs and mesdames) with divided

ardour, and although she thinks London a little *triste*, believes her own house in Belgravia to be a perfect paradise, and loves its lord and hers with a pure, simple, and entire devotion. Mrs. Ropsley is very happy, and so is he.

"The boy is father to the man." I can trace in the late Guardsman — who relinquished his profession at the Peace — the same energy, the same calculating wisdom, the same practical good sense, that distinguished his youth; but he has lost the selfishness which made his earlier character so unamiable, and has acquired in its stead an enlarged view of the duties and purposes of life, a mellow tone of thought, a deeper sense of feeling as to its pleasures and its pains. He has discovered that the way to be happy is not to surround oneself with a rampart of worldly wisdom, *not* to cover the human breast with a shield of cynical defiance, which always fails it at its need, but to take one's share manfully and contentedly of the roses as of the thorns — no more ashamed to luxuriate in the fragrance of the one, than to wince from the sharp points of the other. He entered on life with one predominant idea, and that one perhaps the least worthy of all those which sanguine boyhood proposes so ardently to itself; but he had purpose and energy, and though self was his idol, he worshipped with a perseverance and consistency worthy of a better cause. Circumstances, which have warped so many to evil, rescued him at the turning point of his destiny. When he met Valérie at Vienna, he was rapidly hardening into a bold, bad man, but the

affection with which she inspired him saved him, as such affection has saved many a one before, from that most dangerous state of all in which he lies who has nothing to care for, nothing to hope, and consequently nothing to fear. Oh! you who have it in your power to save the fallen, think of this. How slight is the cable that tows many a goodly vessel into port; what a mere thread will buoy up a drowning man; do not stand on the bank and wag your heads, and say, "I told you so;" stretch but a little finger, throw him the rope that lies to your hand; nay, think it no shame to wet your feet and bring him gently and tenderly ashore, for is he not your brother?

The good work that Valérie's influence had begun, was perfected by the hardships and horrors of the Crimean campaign. No man could witness the sufferings so cheerfully borne, or take his share in the kindly offices so heartily interchanged on that dreary *plateau* above Sebastopol, without experiencing an improvement in his moral being, and imbibing far more correct notions than he had entertained before as to the *realities* of life and death. No man could take his turn of duty day by day in the trenches, see friends and comrades one by one struck down by grapeshot, or withering from disease, and not feel that he too held life on a startlingly uncertain tenure; that if the material were indeed all-in-all, he had no business there; that the ideal has a large share even in this life, and will probably constitute the very essence of that which is to come. It is a mistake to suppose that danger hardens the

heart; on the contrary, it renders it peculiarly alive to the softer and kindlier emotions. The brave are nearly always gentler, more susceptible, than apparently weaker natures; and many a man who does not quail at the roar of a battery, who confronts an advancing column with a careless smile and a pleasant jest upon his lips, will wince like a child at an injury or an unkindness dealt him from the hand he loves.

Ropsley, too, had many a pang of remorse to contend with, many an hour of unavailing regret, as he looked back to the mischief he had wrought by his unscrupulous schemes for his own benefit — the misery, to which in his now softened nature he was keenly alive, that a thoughtless selfishness had brought on his oldest and dearest friends. Poor Victor married in haste, when piqued and angry with one who, whatever might be her faults, was the only woman on earth to *him*. Constance Beverley, driven into this alliance by his own false representations, and her father's ill-judged vehemence. Another old schoolfellow, whom he was at last beginning to value and esteem, attributing the wreck of all he hoped and cherished in the world to this fatal marriage; and he himself ere long wishing to be connected by the nearest and dearest ties with those whose future he had been so instrumental in blasting, and who could not but look upon him as the prime source and origin of all their unhappiness.

No wonder Ropsley was an altered man; no wonder Victor's sudden and awful death made a still

further impression on his awakened feelings; no wonder he prized the blessing he had won, and determined to make himself worthy of a lot the golden joys of which his youth would have sneered at and despised, but which he was grateful to find his manhood was capable of appreciating as they deserved.

Happiness stimulates some tempers to action, as grief goads others to exertion; and Ropsley is not one to remain idle. Though Edeldorf has passed away from the name of De Rohan for evermore, he has obtained a large fortune with his wife; but affluence and comfort alone will not fill up the measure of such a man's existence, and his energetic character will be sure to find some outlet for the talents and acquirements it possesses. Politics will probably be his sphere; and those who know of what efforts a bold far-seeing nature is capable, when backed by study, reflection, above all, common sense; and when blessed with a happy home of love on which to rest, and from which to gather daily new hope and strength, will not think me oversanguine in predicting that something more than a "*Hic jacet*" will, in the fulness of time, be carved on Ropsley's tombstone; that he will do something more in his generation than eat and drink, and pay his son's debts, and make a will, and so lie down and die, and be forgotten.

It is good to be firm, strong-minded, and practical; it is good to swim with the stream, and, without ever losing sight of the landing-place, to lose no

advantage of the current, no lull of the back-water, no rippling eddy in one's favour. It is not good to struggle blindly on against wind and tide, to trust all to a gallant heart, to neglect the beacon and the landmark, to go down at last, unconquered it may be in spirit, but beaten and submerged for all that, in fact. There is an old tale of chivalry which bears with it a deep and somewhat bitter moral: of a certain knight who, in the madness of his love, vowed to cast aside his armour and ride three courses through the *mêlée* with no covering save his lady's night-weeds. Helm, shield, and corselet, mail and plate, and stout buff jerkin, all are cast aside. With bared brow and naked breast the knight is up and away! — amongst those gathering warriors clad from head to foot in steel. Some noble hearts — God bless them! — turn aside to let him pass; but many a fierce blow and many a cruel thrust are delivered at the devoted champion in the throng. Twice, thrice he rides that fearful gauntlet; and ere his good horse stops, the white night-dress is fluttering in rags — torn and hacked, and saturated with blood. It is a tale of Romance, mark that! and the knight recovers, to be happy. Had it been Reality, his ladye might have wrung her hands over a clay-cold corpse in vain. Woe to him who sets lance in rest to ride a tournament with the world! Woe to the warm imagination, the kindly feelings, the generosity that scorns advantage, the soft and vulnerable heart! How it bleeds in the conflict, how it suffers in the defeat! Yet are there some battles in which it is perhaps nobler to lose than to win.

Who shall say in what victory consists? "Discretion is the better part of valour," quoth Prudence; but Courage, with herald-voice, still shouts, "Fight on! brave knights, fight on!"

In the tomb of his fathers, in a gloomy vault, where a light is constantly kept burning, sleeps Victor de Rohan, my boyhood's friend, my more than brother. Many a stout and warlike ancestor lies about him; many a bold Crusader, whose marble effigy, with folded hands and crossed legs, makes silent boast that he had struck for the good cause in the Holy Land, rests there, to shout and strike no more. Not one amongst them all that had a nobler heart than he who joined them in the flower of manhood — the last of his long and stainless line. As the old white-haired sexton opens the door of the vault to trim and replenish the glimmering death-lamp, a balmy breeze steals in and stirs the heavy silver fringe on the pall of Victor's coffin — a balmy breeze that plays round the statue of the Virgin on the chapel roof, and sweeps across many a level mile of plain, and many a fair expanse of wood and water, till it reaches the fragrant terraces and the frowning towers of distant Siebenbürgen — a balmy breeze that cools the brow of yon pale drooping lady, who turns an eager, wistful face towards its breath. For why? It blows direct from where he sleeps at Edeldorf.

She is not even clad in mourning, yet who has mourned him as she has done? She might not even

see him borne to his last home, yet who so willingly would lay her down by his side, to rest for ever with him in the grave?

Alas for you, Rose, Princesse Vocqsal! — you who must needs play with edged tools till they cut you to the quick! — you who must needs rouse passions that have blighted you to the core! — you who never knew you had a heart till the eve of St. Hubert's Day, and found it empty and broken on the morrow of that festival!

She tends that old man now with the patience and devotion of a saint — that old childish invalid in his garden chair, prattling of his early exploits, playing contentedly with his little dog, fretful and impatient about his dinner. This is all that a paralytic stroke, acting on a constitution weakened by excess, has left of Prince Vocqsal.

Nor is the wife less altered than her husband. Who would recognise in those pale sunken features, in that hair once so sunny, now streaked with whole masses of grey, in that languid step and listless, fragile form, the fresh, sparkling roseate beauty of the famous Princesse Vocqsal. She has done with beauty now; she has done with love and light, and all that constitute the charm and the sunshine of life; but she has still a duty to perform. She has still an expiation to make; and with a force and determination which many a less erring nature might fail to imitate, she has set herself resolutely to the task.

Save to attend to her religious duties, comprising many an act of severe and grievous penance, she never leaves her patient. All that woman's care and woman's tenderness can provide, she lavishes on that querulous invalid; with woman's instinct of loving that which she protects, he is dearer to her now than anything on earth; but oh! it is a sad, sad face that she turns to the breeze from Edeldorf.

Her director comes to see her twice a day; he is a grave, stern priest — an old man who has shriven criminals on the scaffold — who has accustomed himself to read the most harrowing secrets of the human soul. He should be dead to sensibility, and blunted to all softer emotions, yet he often leaves the Princess with tears in his grave cold eyes.

She is a Roman Catholic; do not therefore argue that her repentance may not avail. She has been a sinner — scarlet, if you will, of the deepest dye; do not therefore say that the door of mercy will be shut in her face. There are sins besides those of the feelings — crimes which spring from more polluted sources than the affections. The narrow gate is wide enough for all. If you are striving to reach it, walking hopefully along the strait path, it is better not to turn aside and take upon yourself the punishment of every prostrate bleeding sinner; if you must needs stop, why not bind the gaping wounds, and help the sufferer to resume the uphill journey? There are plenty of flints lying about, we know — heavy, sharp, and three-cornered — such as shall strike the poor cowering wretch to the earth, never to rise

again. Which of us shall stoop to lift one of them in defiance of Divine mercy? Which of us shall dare to say, "I am qualified to cast the first stone at her?"

CHAPTER XX.

The Return of Spring.

THE smoke curls up once more from the chimneys of Alton Grange; the woman in possession, she with the soapy arms and unkempt hair, who was always cleaning with no result, has been paid for her occupancy and sent back to her own untidy home in the adjoining village. The windows are fresh painted, the lawn fresh mown, the garden trimmed, and the walks rolled; nay, the unwonted sound of wheels is sometimes heard upon the gravel sweep in front of the house, for the country neighbours, a race who wage unceasing war against anything mysterious, and whose thirst for "news," and energy in the acquisition of gossip, are as meritorious as they are uncalled for, have lavished their attentions on the solitary, and welcomed him back to his lonely home far more warmly than he deserves. The estate, too, has been at nurse ever since he went away. An experienced man of business has taken it into his own especial charge, but somehow the infant has not attained any great increase of vigour under his fostering care, and the proprietor is ungrateful enough to think he could have managed it better for himself. Inside, the house is dark and gloomy still. I miss poor Bold dreadfully. After a day of atten-

tion to those trivial details which the landholder dignifies with the title of "business," or worse still, of vacant, dreary hours passed in listless apathy, it is very lonely to return to a solitary dinner and a long silent evening, to feel that the wag of a dog's tail against the floor would be company, and to own there is solace in the sympathy even of a brute's unreasoning eye. It is not good for man to be alone, and that is essentially a morbid state in which solitude is felt to be a comfort and a relief; more especially does the want of occupation and companionship press upon one who has been leading a life of busy every-day excitement such as falls to the lot of the politician or the soldier; and it has always appeared to me that the worst of all possible preparations for the quiet, homely duties of a country gentleman, are the very two professions so generally chosen as the portals by which the heir of a landed estate is to enter life. It takes years to tame the soldier, and the politician seldom *really* settles down at all; but of course you will do what your fathers did — if the boy is dull, you will gird a sword upon his thigh; if he is conceited, you will get him into Parliament, and fret at the obtuse deafness of the House. Perhaps you may as well be disappointed one way as the other; whatever you do with him, by the time he is thirty you will wish you had done differently, and so will he. Action, however, is the only panacea for despondency; work, work, is the remedy for lowness of spirits. What am I that I should sit here with folded hands, and repine at the common lot? There are none so humble but they

can do some little good, and in this the poor are far more active than the rich. Let me take example by the day labourers at my gate. There is a poor family not a mile from here who sadly lack assistance, and whom for the last fortnight I have neglected to visit. A gleam of sunshine breaks in through the mullioned window, and gilds even the black oak wainscoting: the clouds are passing rapidly away, I will take my hat and walk off at once towards the common. Oh, the hypocrisy of human motives! The poor family are tenants of Constance de Rohan; their cottage lies in the direct road to Beverley Manor.

It has been raining heavily, and the earth is completely saturated with moisture. The late spring, late even for England, is bursting forth almost with tropical luxuriance. Dank and dripping, the fragrant hedges glisten in the noonday beams. Brimful is every blossom in the orchard, fit chalice for the wild bird or the bee. Thick and tufted, the wet grass sprouts luxuriantly in the meadow-lands where the cowslip hangs her scented head, and the buttercup, already dry, reflects the sunshine from its golden hollow. The yellow brook laughs merrily on beneath the foot-bridge, and the swallows shoot hither and thither high up against the clear blue sky. How fresh and tender is the early green of the noble elms in the foreground, and the distant larches on the hill. How sweet the breath of spring; how fair and loveable the smile upon her face. How full of hope and promise and life and light and joy. Oh, the giant capacity for happiness of the human heart. Oh, what a world it might be. What a world it is!

The children are playing about before the door of the cottage on the common. Dirty, and noisy, and rosy, the little urchins stare, wonder-struck, at the stranger, and disappear tumultuously into certain back settlements, where there are a garden, and a beehive, and a pig. An air of increased comfort pervades the dwelling, and its mistress has lost the wan, anxious look it pained me so to see some ten days ago. With a corner of her apron she dusts a chair for me to sit down, and prepares herself for a gossip, in which experience tells me the talking will be all one way. "Her 'old man' is gone out to-day for the first time to his work. He is quite stout again at last, but them low fevers keeps a body down terrible, and the doctor's stuff was no good, and she thinks after all it's the fine weather as has brought him round; leastways, that and the broth Lady Beverley sent him from the Manor House; and she to come up herself only yesterday was a week, through a pour of rain, poor dear! for foreign parts has not agreed with her, and she's not so rosy as she were when I knew her first, but a born angel all the same, and ever will be."

Tears were in the good woman's eyes, and her voice was choked. I stayed to hear no more. Lady Beverley, as she called her, was, then, once more at home. She had been here — here on this very spot, but one short week ago. I could have knelt down and kissed the very ground she had trodden. I longed if it was only to see her footprints. I, who had schooled myself to such a pitch of stoicism and apathy, who had stifled and rooted out and cut down

the germs of passion till I had persuaded myself that they had ceased to exist, and that my heart had become hard and barren as the rock, — I, who had thought that when the time came I should meet her in London with a kindly greeting, as became an old friend, and never turn to look the way she went; and now, because she had been here a week ago, because there was a possibility of her being at the moment within three miles of where I stood, to feel the blood mounting to my brow, the tears starting to my eyes, — oh! it was scarlet shame, and yet it was burning happiness too.

The sun shone brighter, the birds sang more merrily now. There was no longer a mockery in the spring. The dry branch seemed to blossom once more — the worn and weary nature to imbibe fresh energies and renewed life. There was hope on this side the grave, hope that might be cherished without bitterness or remorse. Very dark had been the night, but day was breaking at last. Very bitter and tedious had been the winter, but spring, real spring, was bursting forth. I could hardly believe in the prospect of happiness thus opened to me. I trembled to think of what would be my destiny if I should lose it all again.

In the ecstasy of joy, as in the tumult of uncertainty and the agony of grief, there is but one resource for failing human strength, how feeble and failing none know so well as those whom their fellows deem the noblest and the strongest. That resource has never yet played man false at his need. The haughty brow may be compelled to stoop,

the boasted force of will be turned aside, the proud spirit be broken and humbled to the dust, the race be lost to the swift and the battle go against the strong, but the victory shall be wrested, the goal shall be attained by the clasped hands and the bended knees, and the loving heart that through good and evil has trusted steadfastly to the end.

* * * * *

I may lock the old desk now. I have told my tale; 'tis but the every-day story of the ups and downs of life — the winnings and losings of the game we all sit down to play. One word more, and I have done.

In the solitude of my chamber I took from its hiding-place a withered flower; once it had been a beautiful white rose, how beautiful, how cherished none knew so well as I. Long and steadfastly I gazed at it, conjuring up the while a vision of that wild night, with its flying clouds and its waving fir-trees, and the mocking moonlight shining coldly on the gravel path, and the bitterness of that hour, the bitterest of all that had yet fallen to my lot, and so I fell asleep. And behold it seemed to be noon, midsummer-noon in a garden of flowers, hot and bright and beautiful. The butterfly flitted in the sunshine, and the wood-pigeon mourned sweetly and sadly in the shade. Little children with laughing eyes played and rolled about upon the sward, and ran up, warm and eager to offer me posies of the choicest flowers. One by one I refused them all, for amongst the pride of the garden there was none to me like my own withered rose that I had cherished

so long, and I turned away from each as it was brought me, and pressed her closer to my heart where she always lay.

Then, even as I clasped her she bloomed in her beauty once more, fresh and pure and radiant as of old, steeping my very soul in fragrance, a child of earth indeed, but wafting her sweetness up to heaven.

And I awoke, and prayed that it might not be all a dream.

THE END.

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